Inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector

Donovan Peter Wearing
Southern Cross University
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Donovan Wearing

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ABSTRACT

The researcher undertook this investigation of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector to identify common aspects of management activity that could form the basis of best practice guidelines for adoption by sector leadership.

A qualitative approach was undertaken, set within a social constructivist paradigm, with grounded theory utilised as the basis for the theoretical framework and research methodology. A literature review was conducted prior to data collection and updated following the preparation of the first draft thesis.

Data was collected via semi-structured open interviews with 17 tertiary education sector leaders. The population sample total was 28 vice-chancellors and chief executives. In-depth interviews were conducted providing a rich and deep information base. The researcher recognises that the generalisability of the associated findings is potentially somewhat limited.

From the iterative data collection and analysis processes, shared benefit and strong relationships emerged as the most significant basis for tertiary education institutions to consider collaborating. These factors were considered to be more important than other perceived enablers such as geographical proximity or similarity in institution type or size. The study also identified that collaboration is generally considered to be a positive activity, however it is challenging and resource-intensive to initiate and implement. Research participants suggested that there is no one generic model that can guarantee collaborative success, however there are a number of factors leaders can consider at the preparatory phase to maximise the effectiveness of the planned activity.

The research has provided a basis to create best practice managerial guidelines for adoption by New Zealand tertiary education sector institution leaders to assist their institutions when undertaking collaborative activity. There is possible generic application for adoption by other sectors and to tertiary education institutions in other countries; these are both areas for possible further research.

Keywords: collaboration, tertiary institutions, best practice, leadership, grounded theory.
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### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Chief executive (this abbreviation also means vice-chancellor when used in association with interview participant quotations in Chapter 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief executive officer (alternate title to chief executive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITO</td>
<td>Industry training organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITP</td>
<td>Institute of technology and polytechnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTE</td>
<td>Private training establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>Tertiary Education Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>Tertiary Education Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

This work is an original piece of work by the researcher.

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University’s rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Print Name:……………………………………………………………………

Signature:……………………………………………………………………

Date:…………………………………………………………………………
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It all has to start somewhere and for me it starts with my parents; two people that I owe much, in particular their values and good character. I am pleased that these virtues have appeared in various forms in each of my wonderful daughters, who mercilessly teased me about my ‘lack of progress’ with this doctorate in the way that only daughters can lovingly do to their father.

The staff at Manukau Institute of Technology and Southern Cross University impressed me not only because they set standards, deadlines and administered me professionally throughout the process – they also cared about me as a student and a person. It also seems to be a universal reality that librarians are nice people willing to help a student in need.

The various doctoral colleagues that invariably cross one’s path at symposiums – we are indeed a co-operative that support each other – and there are some traditions such as academia that have their rightful place in this very modern world.

Combining a doctoral thesis with being a chief executive is a big challenge. I was fortunate to have supportive employers who allowed me to embark and continue on this period of study, and also allowed me some flexibility to fit the study around my professional responsibilities.

Along the way, various friends and work colleagues have said and/or done the right thing at the right time. Sometime the littlest things have the biggest impact.

My supervisor Dr Stuart Middleton had the uncanny knack of saying the biggest things in the littlest way. Though at times he worried about losing his grasp on me, he never let go! His calm and insightful support got me to the destination – thank you, Stuart.

It is an indisputable truth that this thesis would never have been submitted if it wasn’t for the fact that I am married to the most marvellous woman in the world. Thank you Catherine for making this dream of mine a reality.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my daughter Madeline Harriet Mary.

Always loved.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the major research area of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector, and presents the wider context within which the research was undertaken. The chapter also outlines the research problem, its justification, and the definitions and delimitations associated with the study.

The chapter also introduces the approach of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1992; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1994), which was the theoretical framework and research methodology that was utilised for this study. Other research methodologies were considered for this research including case study (Yin 1989), action content theory (Bailey 1968), gaming theory (Goffman 1959), discourse theory (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant 2005), bargaining distribution theory (Fenwick 2006) and symbiotic interactionalism (Blumer 1969), along with other analytical disciplines such as the five-step data analysis method (Sarantakos 1993). Further discussion about these methodologies is included in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

A summary of the major research contributions from this study is outlined in this chapter, along with considerations for future research.

This chapter is made up of eight sections.

1. Background to research – the background to the research is discussed in this section, including the broad context of the subject area.

2. Research problem – the research problem at the centre of this study is introduced in this part of the chapter, along with discussions about the scope, resultant theories, contributions and findings.

3. Justification for the research – this section summarises the justification for the research.
4. Research methodology – research methodologies considered for this study are examined in this section, along with a discussion about the selected methodology of grounded theory.

5. Outline of thesis – this section provides an overview of the thesis document including a description of each chapter.

6. Definitions – definitions of terms used in this thesis that require elaboration are listed and explained in this section.

7. Delimitations – delimitations of scope and key assumptions are discussed in this section.

8. Conclusion – this section outlines the conclusion to this chapter and introduces the next chapter.

1.1.1 Background to the research

Over the past 20 years tertiary education institutions in New Zealand have faced increasing challenges in providing greater access for learners while containing or reducing costs. This has led leaders within the sector to review and consider ways to optimise their institution on both an intra and inter-institutional basis. An influencing factor in this process was the New Zealand government tertiary education reforms of 2002 (Ministry of Education 2002, 2004; Tertiary Education Commission 2008) that placed an increasing emphasis and expectation on tertiary institutions to participate in collaborative initiatives. Within this context, tertiary education institutions have increasingly explored different approaches to collaboration as a means to improve their institution’s individual input, and optimise the collective contribution of the sector as a whole.

The researcher has a professional background in tertiary education and direct involvement in a number of collaborative ventures within the New Zealand tertiary education sector. This involvement led to a professional and academic interest in the subject area and the decision to undertake this study.
After an initial investigation, it appeared that there were a number of theory and knowledge gaps within the existing research that was reviewed for this study. First, within the New Zealand tertiary education sector, collaborative studies have generally not been done at an institutional level (Barnes 2003; Codling & Meek 2006; Middleton 2002). Existing research has largely focused on initiatives within and across various organisations, for example, joint academic programme delivery. Second, most existing evidence-based studies examined collaboration in the form of mergers and amalgamations, generally involving only two institutions (Arbuthnott & Bone 1993; Kuh & Robinson 1995). Within the New Zealand context, collaboration often involves a number of institutions engaged in a broader range of co-operative activities. Finally, the literature that was reviewed did not include examples of a grounded theory research methodology being applied to studies of collaborative activity.

This study seeks to address these theory and knowledge gaps by applying a grounded theory approach in investigating how New Zealand tertiary education institutions undertake collaboration to enhance understanding and best practice within the sector as a whole.

### 1.2 The research problem, propositions/research issues and contributions

The research problem this study seeks to address is:

1. What is the experience of institutional leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?

The researcher concluded that collaboration is distinctly different from other types of co-operative activity, such as partnerships and mergers, and is based on enduring, rather than time-bound, relationships. Further, it is characterised by the participating institutions retaining their identity throughout the collaborative process. Another major finding was the importance of ensuring the participating institutions were ‘organisationally ready’ and predisposed to collaboration, and the relative importance of strong inter-personal and inter-
institutional relationships and trust as enablers to effective collaboration. These findings are summarised in section 1.2.4 of this chapter, outlined in greater depth in Chapter 4, and form the basis of the researcher’s contribution to knowledge, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

1.2.1 Research scope

Following the initial literature review, the scope of research was refined to the following four areas:

1. A subset of the education sector, namely tertiary;
2. A country, namely New Zealand;
3. An institution type, namely universities and polytechnics;
4. A management layer, namely university vice-chancellors and polytechnic or institute of technology chief executives.

The research focused on Vice-Chancellors’ and Chief Executives’ to keep the data amount to a manageable level, noting no participant was chosen for any reason other than their willingness to be interviewed. After further literature was reviewed and a period of reflective consideration (Phillips & Pugh 1987), the scope of the research was further refined to the following:

1. The nature of a specific management activity, namely collaboration;
2. The type of collaboration, namely inter-institutional;
3. A research methodology, namely grounded theory;
4. A data collection approach, namely interviewing leaders within the sector to obtain their personal experiences and professional insights.

The scope of the research was refined to focus on the collaborative process and Figure 1.1 below, illustrates that this collaborative process does not exist within a vacuum rather it is influenced by a range of external forces.
1.2.2 Research theories

The literature that was reviewed for this study and is outlined in more detail in Chapter 2, discusses a number of theories of relevance to this research. These theories were drawn upon to provide the theoretical framework on which to base the study, and to aid in selecting the research methodology, including data collection and analysis processes, to be used.

Major bodies of theory included: grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1992; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1994), symbolic interactionalism (Blumer 1969), action content theory (Bailey 1968), discourse theory (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant 2005), and bargaining distribution theory (Fenwick 2006). These theories had potential utility to address the research problem, particularly because of their relative emphasis on an individual’s influence within a wider contextual setting. Consideration of these theories suggested that a
population sample comprising leaders within the tertiary education sector could provide data from which new theories could be developed to advance understanding about, and the success of, collaborative initiatives.

The literature that was reviewed also informed the process of selecting the research methodology to be used for this study. This included literature that dealt with the link between research theory and research methodology (Creamer 2003; Crowson 1987). This process led to the selection of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) as both the theoretical framework and research discipline to apply to the data collection and analysis stages.

More discussion about the methodology used for this study is outlined in section 1.3 below and in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of Chapter 3.

1.2.3  Research problem and research issues

The initial stages of this research were focused on defining the specific research problem that would be addressed by this study. This process commenced with the researcher identifying the following initial research issues:

1. What are the ways that tertiary institutions undertake collaborative activity?
2. What are the learnings from these experiences and how could these be applied to the sector as a whole to better prepare leaders and institutions for collaborative activity?

From these two broad research questions, five further research issues were contemplated:

1. How does the practical experience of collaborative activity differ from some of the principles and theories associated with collaboration?
2. What are some of the major enablers and dis-enablers to effective inter-institutional collaboration?
3. What are the broader influencing factors on collaborative activity?
4. How do institution leaders turn rhetoric into reality? What part can leaders or other key individuals play in effectively preparing for and undertaking collaboration?
5. Can the attributes of successful collaboration be specifically identified, measured and replicated in a variety of tertiary education institutional settings?

The above questions were composed during the development of the formal research proposal and contributed to the initial research questionnaire. Following further iteration, the study then centred on two main research questions:

1. What is the experience of leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?

These questions represented the research problem at the centre of this study.

1.2.4 Research contributions/findings

This research made a number of contributions about the practice of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector, including:

1. Shared benefit and strong relationships are the most significant basis on which institutions enter collaboration. These factors were considered to be more important than other perceived enablers such as geographical proximity, similarity of organisation size or qualification for central funding.
2. Institutions are most likely to collaborate with other organisations where there are existing relationships that are based on shared values and trust.
3. To be an effective collaborative partner, institutions need to have an internal culture of co-operation and should be pre-disposed to collaboration at all levels of the organisation.
4. A pre-disposition to collaborate needs to be supported by a number of factors including: clear agreed principles on which the collaboration will be based; adequate resources to operationalise the initiative; effective communication between and within the participating organisations; and an appreciation of the amount of time that may be required to implement the initiative in the most optimal way.
5. Leaders have a major influence on the effectiveness of collaboration; however there must be support and participation from staff at as many layers of the organisation as possible for collaboration to thrive.

6. There is no one foolproof model for effective collaboration; however there are a number of factors that can be considered at the early stages to enhance the likelihood of success.

7. Bi-lateral collaborative arrangements are generally easier to implement than multi-laterals as the number of participants and degree of complexity is less.

8. Collaboration for new initiatives is generally easier to implement than co-operative arrangements for existing activities.

9. The existing approach of central agencies to collaboration in the tertiary education sector is considered by leaders in the field to be ineffective and unhelpful to encouraging meaningful inter-institutional collaboration. Tertiary sector leaders suggest that central agencies could be more flexible and less prescriptive about the attributes required to receive funding to support collaborative initiatives.

Conclusions about the research issues and proposition are discussed in section 5.2 of Chapter 5. These findings and conclusions contributed to a series of conclusions about the research problem, which are discussed in section 5.3 of Chapter 5 (listed below):

1. Collaboration is generally considered to be a positive activity; however it is challenging and resource-intensive to initiate and implement. As a result, institutions need to carefully consider why, when, how and with who they choose to collaborate.

2. The main ingredients for successful collaboration include a number of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ factors; however, ‘soft’ factors are generally the most essential elements, contributing to the complex nature of most collaborative activity.

3. Collaboration is ‘all about the relationship’, which is often why collaboration is so challenging, time consuming and complicated to implement.

4. One of the most important things a leader can do to assist effective collaboration is to stop and consider all the potential factors at the preparatory phase.

5. Effective collaboration requires a ‘whole of organisation’ approach; leaders need to ensure their institution is organisationally ready before embarking on collaboration.
6. Project methodologies and infrastructure to support collaboration needs to balance structure and flexibility to allow collaborative activities to establish and unfold in an evolving manner.

7. Central agencies can do much to encourage meaningful collaboration to take place.

8. The potential benefits that effective collaboration can provide suggests it is meaningful alternative to institutional mergers in achieving gains for learners and communities and delivering value from the overall tertiary education budget.

Implications for theory, including the development of a new theoretical framework (Figure 5.4), are discussed in section 5.4 of Chapter 5, while implications for policy and practice, including suggested guidelines for practical application are discussed in section 5.5 and included in appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

1.3 Justification for the research

As outlined in section 1.1, the practice of collaboration is of increasing importance to the tertiary education sector as institutions strive to improve their individual and the sector’s collective performance in preparing, developing and extending the capabilities and capacity of New Zealand’s workforce capital. Previous research into collaborative activity that was examined as part of the literature review, which is discussed in Chapter 2, identified three significant theory gaps that this study seeks to address:

1. Research about collaborative ventures has largely focused on institutional mergers and amalgamations, rather than collective activity between two or more institutions where the organisations maintain their distinct identity throughout the collaborative process (Daigle & Robinson 2000; Middleton 2002).

2. There is little previous research into collaborative activity among tertiary institutions in the New Zealand context.

3. There is no apparent evidence of studies into tertiary education institutional collaboration that utilise a grounded theory methodological approach.

This study utilises grounded theory to identify learnings from the personal experiences of institution leaders to advance understanding and best practice of inter-institutional
collaboration in the tertiary education sector. The suitability of grounded theory as an appropriate methodology is discussed in the next section of this chapter and is examined in depth in section 3.1 of Chapter 3.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Methodology selection

As outlined in section 1.1, a number of research methodologies were considered for this study. The researcher considered that interviewing tertiary institution leaders about their personal experiences could provide insights into the elements of collaborative activity that contribute to the success or failure of the initiative. After reviewing a number of possible methodologies, the researcher considered it was more appropriate to use a constructivist rather than objectivist approach. A constructivist approach focuses on the situations, assumptions and tacit rules associated with a particular context (Corbin & Strauss 1990; Ely 1991; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Strauss & Corbin 1998). In contrast, an objectivist approach places greater emphasis on factual matters such as chronology, known events and measurable details (Ely 1991; Glaser 1978; Guba & Lincoln 1994).

If a positivist approach had been undertaken the researcher would have approached the study with prediction and control (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This would have involved developing a hypothesis to be tested, leaning towards a cause-effect approach. Robustness would have come from proving or disproving a hypothesis, making analysis easier as there would be greater opportunity for identifying a right or wrong answer. The difficulty with this approach is that the researcher assumes a stance of a dispassionate, aloof inquirer; this would be challenging given the nature of the research being undertaken (Charmaz 2006) and because the researcher is associated with the research area.

The researcher considered hypothesis-based approaches could have a risk of constraining the ability of participants in an interview setting to fully contribute the depth of their knowledge and experience of inter-institutional collaboration. The researcher also sought to use an approach that would allow the data to emerge in an unconstrained manner.
From this assessment, expanded in section 3.1 of Chapter 3, grounded theory was selected as an optimal way of capturing and analysing the personal experiences of institution leaders to form theories from which practical tools and recommendations could be developed and disseminated within the tertiary education sector. The essence of grounded theory is that original analysis is based around a data-grounded system of iteration between the data that is collected and the concepts it creates. Data is studied via a qualitative coding process that attaches descriptors of what is being described by the study participants. Being qualitative, it is acknowledged that the researcher is hearing the data through their personal perspectives and social constructs (Charmaz 2006).

Data analysis for grounded theory involves a series of coding techniques, with each building a deeper layer of data insight. First, the researcher codes the collected data, in this case interview transcripts. Next, codes are grouped into concept headings that provide the base level of reflective analysis and iterative interaction with data already collected as well as data to be collected at a later date. Third, categories are formed that have been abducted and facilitate the formulation of a theory based upon that particular grouping. Fourth, an overarching theory or theories are developed that provide a framework to explain the area under research. Analytical robustness is enhanced by constantly comparing data with analysis at each stage of data collection and the resulting theories are built from the data up – hence grounded theory. Figure 1.2 below illustrates this iterative process.
The process of transforming the collected data through data analysis to theory is aided by the grounded theory technique of ‘memoing’ (Charmaz 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967). Memoing captures initial analytical reflections and insights, assisting the identification of data gaps, relationships and patterns. Memos are a ‘memo to self’ as opposed to a business memo, and are prepared in a format that most advances the researcher’s thinking (Charmaz 2006). Based on the data collected, memos serve to flag, reflect and refine the researcher’s thinking about what is possibly going on within that data. Memos could cover questions such as: what are people saying, what might lie beneath what they are saying, what is the underlying structure and/or context for that particular contribution, how does it relate to other contributions made by the same participant/by others, and what patterns are emerging? The memo process was particularly useful as verbatim extracts from the transcripts were used as ‘stakes in the ground’ to develop theories and reflect those theories back into existing data as well as introduce theories into subsequent interviews. As a result, the interview questions also evolved. These ‘stakes in the ground’ appear as primary source quotations throughout Chapter 4.
Memos also assist in focusing on what might emerge as first points of reference for theory building. The process of composing memos, like coding, is iterative. Indeed, the iteration process is now extended so that the researcher interacts between data-code-memo and from data direct to memo to continually challenge contributions and the assumptions attached to them. This continual self-reflective analysis reduces the risk of forcing data to fit preconceptions brought by the researcher to the data and reduces the risk of matching the data to existing theoretical explanations. It also assists in identifying new ideas from the participants’ contributions as opposed to simply cataloguing a series of historical narratives.

1.4.2 Data sample size and collection

Grounded theory advocates that data sample size is not a function of population representation; data saturation is achieved by the intensity of interaction by the participants and obtaining sufficient data for the construction of theory. Grounded theorists assert that interviewing in depth can provide a conduit into seeing a complete picture of the area of interest (Charmaz 2006). Some 17 participants out of a total data sample size of 28 were interviewed for this research. Participants included 3 university vice-chancellors and 14 institute of technology or polytechnic chief executives. Data was collected via open semi-structured interviews (Patton 2002) and provided 12.5 hours of interview transcripts with over 103,000 words to code.

The data collection process maintained a degree of formality. This formality was important in ensuring the participants understood the broad principles of ethical research including matters such as consent and confidentiality. Ethical issues are discussed in greater detail in section 3.3 of Chapter 3. An interview guide including interview questions was sent to participants prior to the interview as a mechanism to convey the broad topic under consideration and to provide an indication of the likely issues to be addressed. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix 3.1.

The interview process balanced the need for consistency with the desire to facilitate free-flowing dialogue. A manifestation of this unconstrained approach is that participants could reflect back on earlier interview contributions and refine and review what they had said.
Participants contributed from a personal and values based perspective rather than maintaining ‘the company line’. The collection and analysis of action and associated processes is fundamental to sound grounded theory to ensure the researcher uncovers ‘what is happening’ (Glaser 1978). For this to occur, the data collection seeks to capture the complete picture of the participants’ actions and interactions of their experiences. Put simply, the aim is to obtain what participants did or did not do in the area of collaborative activity and, just as importantly, what they thought they did or did not do. Each stage of the interview process sought to gather the most granular level of data upon which to build compelling explanations and theory. This approach was effective in identifying initial thoughts to be refined and further reflected upon. This constant iteration, illustrated in Figure 1.2 above, is examined in more depth in section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

Figure 1.3 below provides an overview of the research design and methodology process applied for this study.
More detail about grounded theory is discussed in section 2.3 of Chapter 2. Justification of the appropriateness of grounded theory and its application to address the research is expanded in section 3.1 of Chapter 3.
In summary, the research iteratively moved between the stages of: collect, analyse and reflect. The data collection approach facilitated and guided the research via a planned and purposively selected successive interview process (Patton 2002). The use of the semi-structured open interview framework ensured some common information was obtained, while allowing each participant to contribute their own particular views, nuances and experiences. This approach maximised the potential for distinctive contributions from each and every interview, as well as facilitating comparative analysis across all interviews.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The format and structure of this thesis is based on the five-chapter approach advanced by Perry (2002). Further, the structure within each chapter is also based on the suggested outline provided by Perry (2002) and as such each chapter is relatively self-contained leading duplication of text.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction discusses the background to the research area and the process of defining the research problem and associated research issues. It provides an overview of the planned research and the justification for the chosen area of study, illustrates the delimitations of scope and key assumptions, outlines the selected research methodology, and provides an outline of the thesis document as a whole.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

Chapter 2 discusses the literature that was reviewed for this study, which provided preliminary information about the research area and helped refine specific areas of interest and potential knowledge gaps. The literature review also uncovered theories related to the research problem and assisted in considering and selecting theoretical frameworks and research methodologies to underpin the study. The selected theoretical framework and research methodology of grounded theory is discussed in more detail in this chapter, including a commentary about its theoretical appropriateness, particularly in relation to data collection and analysis.
Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 3 examines the justification for the research methodology and discusses the research procedures used in the study along with associated ethical matters. The essential components of the research are discussed in this chapter including:

1. The characteristics of research paradigms;
2. The selection of the appropriate research method;
3. The selected data collection method;
4. The population sample and selection process;
5. The data analysis process;
6. Factors associated with generalisability and validity;
7. Ethical considerations.

This chapter also discusses the high degree of iteration that occurred during the research process, incorporating the research methodology, data collection and data analysis stages.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged from the data collection and analysis processes, and the conclusions drawn from these specific and collective findings. A feature of this chapter is the use of direct source data in the form of participant quotations to support the findings that are presented and discussed.

Chapter 5: Implications and conclusion

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions drawn from the findings discussed in Chapter 4. The chapter goes on to examine implications reached about the research problem and propositions, and associated implications for theory, public policy and management practice. This includes suggested guidelines and practical tools to aid enhanced understanding about inter-institutional collaboration and advance best practice in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. These guidelines in the form of checklists are included in the appendices as
appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. Limitations associated with the study are discussed in this chapter. The chapter also includes discussions about implications related to methodology and possible areas for future research.

1.6 Definitions

This section identifies key words used in this study and confirms how they relate to the subject material under investigation. This is important to manage the risk of using un-defined terms inter-changeably. The word collaboration is applied freely and broadly within both public sector and private industry settings. It is invariably viewed in a positive context and a broad definition may well be ‘working with others’. Because there are many ways of defining collaboration, there was a need within the context of this research to gain a greater degree of preciseness; this was achieved using the approach advocated by Lang (2002) to define the term. For the data collection phase of this study, collaboration was defined to mean the process where leaders bring an open mind and approach to inter-institutional activity. The goals of collaboration are explored in depth, in Chapter 4 section 4.4.2 (see pages 137 to 147) under six headings, namely shared benefit; organisational effectiveness and business viability; stakeholder benefit – students, regions, staff; necessity – financial and/or regulatory pressure; an alternative to competition; altruism – contributing to the greater good.

In keeping with some of the underlying tenets of grounded theory the thesis purposely avoids any attempt, beyond the term collaboration, to define other possible descriptors of types of collaboration. These tenets are discussed in Chapter 2 (see pages 66 to 68), in greater depth in Chapter 3 Section 3.2.2 ‘Selection and justification of chosen research methodology’ (pages 75 to 82), and in particular section 3.2.3 ‘Grounded theory (pages 83 to 86). In addition Chapter 3 Section 3.2.3 explores the conceptual approach within grounded theory to minimise the degree that the research is predetermined by structure (see page 83).

Given the theoretical framework of this study is underpinned by grounded theory, some key terms associated with this approach do require definition. This includes the use of the word abduction, which within grounded theory is defined as a synthesis of deductive and inductive knowledge (Charmaz 2006). Next, when used in the data collection and analysis context, a concept is a term that captures an overarching description of the various sub-elements of
analysis that have built the notion of the concept. *Open coding* is the term used to describe first level of data analysis where, in this study, the interview transcripts are annotated line by line. *Axial coding* is the process of using a base level of coding to create a filter to selectively code subsequent data, folding back the new data into the open codes. *Il vivo* is the term used to describe data that conveys information and emotive emphasis. In grounded theory, *memoing* refers to notes or diagrams taken during the research process, particularly the data collection and analysis phases, which capture thoughts and initial insights that could contribute to theory building.
1.7 Delimitations of scope and key assumptions

The research area was consciously chosen to be narrow to capture a depth of personal leadership experience about how New Zealand tertiary education institutions collaborate. Research was focused on a sub-element of the New Zealand education sector (tertiary education), and a sub-sector within tertiary education (universities, institutes of technology, polytechnics). As the institutional type was restricted to New Zealand universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics, it excluded wananga, industry training organisations, and private training establishments.

Given these delimitations, there are opportunities for future research to broaden the scope of institution types under investigation and to apply the research problem more broadly, for example, comparative international studies or collaboration between tertiary institutions and industry in general. Possible areas of future research are examined in section 5.8 of Chapter 5.

This study was not hampered by any major limitations, for example, a widespread unwillingness of potential participants to be interviewed or logistical issues that prevented interviews from occurring. Potential limitations associated with the theoretical framework and research methodologies selected for this research are examined in section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

1.8 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to identify and promulgate a greater depth of knowledge about how New Zealand tertiary institutions can more effectively collaborate. This chapter provides an overview of the research problem area, and the theoretical framework and research methodology selected to address this. The reasons why the research is of academic interest and is topical for leaders and institutions within the New Zealand tertiary education sector are also discussed.
The chapter includes a preliminary discussion about the choice and application of grounded theory as the theoretical framework and research methodology for the study. It also includes a list of definitions associated with the study and a commentary on the delimitations of the research. The chapter also presents the major findings and conclusions that resulted from this study.

The next chapter examines previous literature that relates to inter-institutional collaboration along with research methodologies that could be applied in undertaking a study to better understand inter-institutional collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter details the literature review that was undertaken for this study. It provides an overview of the literature that was reviewed on the research subject of inter-institutional collaboration, and on the texts accessed to assist in selecting an appropriate theoretical framework and research methodology.

The chapter is made up of five sections.

1. Background – this section provides an overview of the subject area and the planned research.

2. Approach to the literature review – the approach that was followed to undertake the literature review is outlined in this section.

3. Parent theory and the emergence of research problem theories – reviewed literature relating to parent theories relevant to the subject area of collaboration, along with reviewed texts that contributed to identifying the research problem, are outlined in this part of the chapter.

4. Research framework and methodology – reviewed literature relating to the analytical and theoretical frameworks considered for this study are discussed in this section. The section also provides an overview of the theoretical framework of grounded theory, which was adopted for this research.

5. Conclusion – a summary of the literature review and a preview of the following chapter are outlined in this section.
2.2 Background

The 2002 New Zealand government policy reforms for the tertiary education sector highlighted and emphasised the expectation and need for collaboration between institutions (Ministry of Education 2002, 2004; Tertiary Education Commission 2008). While this research is not concerned with policy frameworks for collaboration within tertiary education in New Zealand, the prevailing government approach to tertiary sector institutional collaboration does provide a wider context and policy setting for this study (Codling & Meek 2006).

Within the field of tertiary institutional collaboration there has been a strong focus on mergers and amalgamations, such as the examples examined in Arbuthnott and Bone (1993), Harman (2000) and Breuder (1996). The literature that was reviewed for this study reflects this perspective, and there are many ‘how to’ books and journal articles on tertiary institution amalgamations, including the manner in which old institutional identities are lost and new ones are formed (Ramsbottom & Baus 1999; Thomas & Woodrow 2002). Mention (or in this modern era, search online) the word collaboration and the conversation (search engine) works its way seamlessly to numerous examples of this type of collaborative activity. Other literature that was reviewed focused on the area of joint programme delivery or on collaboration for scientific research, both within and across tertiary institutions (Kezar 2005; Kruss 2006; Parkyn 1999). By nature, these collaborative initiatives are focused on quite specific areas of collective activity.

From reviewing a range of literature relating to collaboration in the tertiary education sector, a gap was identified in terms of research focused on inter-institutional collaborative ventures that were not concerned with governance, such as mergers, or with joint programme delivery. Little evident research had been done into significant collaborative activity that was more than individual programme delivery or where each institution sought to maintain its individual identity. This research seeks to fill that gap by focusing on this particular type of inter-institutional collaborative activity.
This study also aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to tertiary education collaboration in two further ways. First, as previously mentioned, there was a lack of research into tertiary inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand setting. The reviewed research was undertaken in other countries, predominantly in the western world. Second, from the researcher’s investigation during the literature review phase there was no evident research on tertiary education institutional collaboration using a grounded theory methodological approach. The researcher considered that grounded theory could provide new knowledge into the field of collaboration that could potentially be applied to the sector as a whole. Existing research had largely used qualitative approaches such as case study (Yin 2003), action content theory (Bailey 1968), discourse theory (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant 2005), bargaining distribution theory (Fenwick 2006) and symbiotic interactionalism (Blumer 1969). A discussion on these methodologies is outlined in section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

Collectively, the reviewed literature suggested that there was a contribution to knowledge to be made from both a focus on broader manifestations of institutional collaboration than mergers and amalgamations, and on the manner in which the research was to be conducted. One of the elements that appeared to be missing in the literature review was the perspective of leaders involved in tertiary institution collaboration, and their views on best practice in collaborative undertakings. In addition, there was an absence in the reviewed literature for a piece of research that was grounded in the experience of leaders from within the tertiary sector; a piece of research that collated this collective wisdom into a useful contribution to the body of knowledge that could potentially be disseminated into working practice.

The literature review that was undertaken for this research contributed to defining the research problem area and to selecting the methodological and analytical approaches that would be used for this study. In summary, the study seeks to use a grounded theory approach to theory building in respect to collaborative activity among New Zealand tertiary education institutions to address the research problem of:

1. What is the experience of institutional leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?
Further detail about grounded theory is provided in section 2.5 of this chapter and in Chapter 3 Section 3.2.3.

Grounded theorists can eschew the role that undertaking a literature review can bring to data collection (Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss 1967). Such theorists suggest that a review of literature places an unhelpful constraint on bringing an open mind to the collection and analysis of data. This perspective suggests that theory building is heavily influenced by pre-existing knowledge that can unduly restrict the extent that the collected data can reveal new theory. In contrast, more recent commentators (Charmaz 2006; Dey 1999) consider that a literature review can constructively assist in facilitating an informed yet open mind within the research methodology of grounded theory, while being conscious of the standard and acceptable disclosure of researcher bias that all qualitative orientated research activities acknowledge. This study has adopted the latter approach and has used the literature review to help identify gaps in the body of knowledge in respect of the subject area and the research methodologies that have been applied to that subject area.

2.3 Approach to the literature review

During the initial stages of this literature review, online library collection search engines such as Emerald were used to identify literature relating to the subject area of collaboration in the tertiary education sector. After discussions with colleagues and the researcher’s doctoral supervisor, 16 journals were identified for further analysis (see Appendix 2.1).

Most of these journals were focused on educational administration with the balance centred on general management. The journals provided insights into the subject area under investigation, namely tertiary institution collaboration, and were also a source of theoretical approaches to both the research area and possible research methodologies. Following this initial reading, further independent reading and recommendations from colleagues and academic contacts, some specific articles, books and conference proceedings were also reviewed.
The foundation for selecting a suitable theoretical framework for this study emanated from the preliminary literature review and prior study related to qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Following this process, Neumann (2006) and Patton (2002) were accessed to provide further guidance on possible theoretical frameworks and methodologies, along with the work of Daigle and Robinson (2000) in their investigation into the failed strategic partnership embarked upon by California State University in the 1990s. Articles that addressed issues of the ebb and flow of institutional dynamics (Fenwick 2006), the lexicon of collaboration (Lang 2002), and the structural determinants of attributes within successful collaboration (Silverman 1995) were also particularly apt in providing some indicative possible theoretical frameworks.

A number of the theoretical frameworks and research methodologies were then reviewed to identify an approach that would be most apposite in filling the identified gaps in the body of knowledge, and contributing research that could be applied to the tertiary education sector as a whole. Approaches that postulated a theory to obtain a perspective on that theory were considered to be potentially limiting in providing insights from tertiary institution leaders’ personal experiences that could then be shared within the wider industry. In contrast, an approach that maximised leaders’ ability to share their experiences and the learnings from those experiences in a ‘free and frank’ manner, from which findings and wider contributions could be identified, was considered to be a more appropriate path. It became readily apparent that the most suitable approach involved utilising a theoretical approach that provided research discipline while concurrently allowing research participants, in this case tertiary education leaders, to contribute without the constraint of responding to a hypothesis. From this process, the concept of grounded theory emerged as being the most effective approach for undertaking the study.

The essence of grounded theory is that original analysis is based around a data grounded system of iteration between data and the concepts it creates (Charmaz 2006). Data is studied via a qualitative coding process that attaches descriptors of what is being described by the study participants. Participants provide source material which is then rigorously analysed. Through successive iterations, building blocks of coded data become increasingly more abstract, although they remain linked to the source data. As a result, the theories are built
from the data up – hence grounded theory. A fuller discussion of grounded theory, alongside other theoretical approaches, can be found in section 2.5.

The chapter now provides more details about the role of the literature review in identifying the research problem and the theoretical framework and methodology to investigate the problem, beginning with the parent theories relating to the research area and culminating in the emergence of the research problem.

2.4 Parent theory and the emergence of research problem theories

2.4.1 Introduction and approach

The parent theory adopted by this research was tertiary education institutional collaboration. A parent theory is a broad background theory that contributes to the area under research (Perry 2002). The parent theory for this study could have been collaboration in the wider education sector; however discussion with colleagues and the researcher’s supervisor reinforced the risks of such a wide scope and highlighted the logistical and research outcome benefits of refining the parent discipline to a more containable scope. This provided the contextual background to focus the research area and identify how the research problem interacted with the concept of the parent theory.

Existing research into tertiary education collaboration seemed to reside mainly in the context of mergers and amalgamations that could lead to a potential loss of institutional identity. In contrast, this study was interested in examining examples of collaboration where the participating institutions maintained their individual identity, and sought to shed light on the enablers and dis-enablers that could potentially provide a strong and sustainable foundation for collaborative initiatives to thrive. Accordingly, the parent theory of tertiary institutional collaboration was refined into three sub-parent disciplines: the maintenance of institutional identity, models for collaboration, and the contributing role of tertiary institutional leadership.

The researcher then moved to contemplate possible research problem subject categories to help clarify where the specific focus of the parent theory and research problem coincided and overlapped. The initial review of 16 academic journals mentioned above provided a plethora
of possible research problems. Whenever a title or abstract manifested either a relevant topic or possible research methodology, it was collated and eventually organised into the 10 major subject categories listed below. These subject categories all represent a possible permutation of the research problem.

This aided in confirming the research area of maximum interest and considering what might be of significant practical application to managerial best practice. Although not exhaustive, the broad review of the 10 possible research subject categories provided ample ground for areas of possible future research. Some of these areas of possible future research are revisited again in section 5.8 of Chapter 5.

The 10 subject categories were:

1. Collaboration;
2. Mergers and acquisitions;
3. Links between tertiary institutions and the market place;
4. Links between tertiary institutions and industry;
5. Applying modern business practice;
6. Policy issues;
7. Theoretical issues;
8. Lifelong learning;
9. Community interaction with tertiary institutions;

The 16 journals that were initially accessed for the literature review provided direction for other articles, books and conference proceedings that could be useful in terms of their applicability to the broad area under investigation. Selected articles and other reference material were reviewed as a result of this process. This material was integrated with the initial readings and the combined information was further refined into five sub-categories. These sub-categories indicated more specific areas for further investigation and helped define the research parameters.
The sub-categories were:

1. Models of tertiary institutional collaboration;
2. The basis for collaborative activity;
3. Attributes of successful tertiary institutional collaboration;
4. Institutional readiness to collaborate;
5. The role of leaders in collaborative ventures.

This series of topics bound the scope of enquiry and provided a framework within which both the issues of the prevailing tertiary sector context and the current literature in this area could be described and could inform the intended methodology and approach. In addition, this information helped provide the initial framework for approaching the research.

Having identified the key areas for further investigation, the chapter now goes into more detail about the literature reviewed in each of these areas, and contributing information that was relevant to this study.

2.4.2 Models of collaboration

The first sub-category that was investigated was the models or types of structure adopted for collaborative activity to identify possible factors that could influence the success of collaborative initiatives. The quest to identify the best type of collaborative model is at the centre of much of the discussion around organisational collaboration in both literature and other forums. For example, inter-organisational relationships was the main emphasis of the 2002 British Academy of Management annual conference (Shepherd 2002). A broad range of themes and concepts relating to institutional collaboration were presented at this event including: relational aspects, processes, metrics, dynamic evolution, context and management.

A starting point in investigating this subject area was Thomas and Woodrow’s (2002) study on the means to widen participation into higher education, which included a particularly apt quote: “Nor of course is collaboration a thing at all, but many different things, often bearing little resemblance to each other” (Thomas & Woodrow 2002, p. 5).
Thomas and Woodrow’s (2002) investigation describes the following four categories of collaborative models:

1. **Pyramids** – this model usually features a leading institution that dominates how the other institutional parties inter-relate to each other. Within this environment, collaborative initiatives tend to be ‘pushed through’ and there is a greater sense of direction and a clear mandate from the early stages. Because of this, collaborative activities within this model are usually relatively easy to measure and monitor progress.

2. **Bridges** – these feature institutions that are similar in structure, nature and scale. Collaborative activities within this model tend to be substantive and have a long term orientation. A characteristic of bridge-type initiatives is the tendency to take a relatively long time to ‘get traction’ and progress because there is no one dominant player; this makes it challenging to establish a common view and agree measures for success.

3. **Spiders** – this model usually features lots of organisations working together from different parts of the sector and, at times, from outside the sector as well. The organisations involved can be very different in size and nature. The spider model is highly integrated but problematic due to the complexity caused by the number and varying agendas of the organisations involved. Collaborative activities within this model tend to exist due to relationships at an individual level rather than at an institutional level, with initiatives relying on the attitudes of the people involved rather than on institutional commitment.

4. **Marriages** – collaborative activities in this category are often motivated from a central and/or political imposition and often with the expectation of cost effectiveness. They also tend to exist simply because there is a requirement or an expectation that they will. This imperative can either be beneficial or detrimental, and possibly both. This category usually features amalgamations.

Thomas and Woodrow’s (2002) study did not attempt to identify the most effective model. Rather, their approach focused on identifying common attributes to describe manifestations of collaboration. For the researcher the ‘marriages’ category seemed to reflect the New Zealand operating environment, with the current emphasis placed on inter-institutional collaboration by central policy and funding agencies. The researcher was also interested in the ‘pyramid’ model in terms of the influence that leaders’ personalities have in a
collaborative setting. Thomas and Woodrow’s (2002) description of pyramids suggest that the dominant institution in this model is defined by a dominant personality rather than differences in institution size or type.

A different yet related approach to describing models of collaboration features three types of collaborative arrangements: competition, co-ordination and co-operation (Robinson, Hewitt & Harriss 2000) that are described below.

1. **Competition** – this term describes rivalry of institutions to achieve cost effectiveness in the system and provide choices to learners.
2. **Co-ordination** – is described as institutions working together to make the most of existing resources. Invariably in this scenario, good intentions are often implemented based on anecdote rather than evidence, and involve the division of resources and/or activities on geographical and/or functional lines of activity. This is done with the intention of optimising the contribution of each participating organisation to the common good.
3. **Co-operation** – is the concept of bringing together diverse and distinct institutions to achieve a greater sum of activity and output than could be achieved as individual organisations working alongside each other. It is based on the premise that successful collaboration leads to synergistic outputs where two or more entities collectively behave in a new and more efficacious manner.

The differences between collaboration and co-operation are also discussed by Short and Stein (2001). Collaboration is described as exhibiting mutual respect, openness and trust between parties, along with shared responsibility for problem solving and risk taking. This approach suggests working co-creatively towards establishing something new. In contrast, the authors’ description of co-operation is manifested as having a relatively short term orientation and a limited scope of activity. The parties involved tend to remain close to previously established patterns of activity. Co-operative activity is described as often being instigated due to issues of expediency that are facing the institution rather than a proactive decision to develop new ways of working partnership. Short and Stein (2001) also present four categories of collaborative models: builder, broker, ballerina, and baker.
These categories are described below.

1. **Builder** – this model is described as a network of like-minded institutions. The network is based on vertical integration, for example, creating a ‘staircase’ for learners to follow across the institutions involved and allowing them to transition in a seamless way.

2. **Broker** – the participating institutions in this model allocate activities based on the institutions’ relative strengths. Broker arrangements identify ‘who is best at doing what’ and form their structure and operations based on this.

3. **Ballerina** – these ventures see the participating institutions working collaboratively without the loss of identity of any one organisation. Each institution still exists in its own right.

4. **Baker** – this model involves the fusion of the participating institutions into one new organisation. In this situation, the individual institutions no longer have their own identity.

The researcher was interested in the issue of institutional identity in relation to these models, particularly the ‘ballerina’ category that highlighted the maintenance of individual organisations’ identities and the ‘baker’ category that resulted in institutions’ identities being lost. This resonated with the researcher’s views on the relative merits of a ‘salad bowl’ approach to collaboration where the individual institutions (or ingredients) retain their distinct identities compared to a ‘melting pot’ where a new identity based on the combination of participating organisations is created.

Short and Stein (2001) have a similar approach to Thomas and Woodrow (2002) in that they do not seek to promote one model over another in regard to its potential effectiveness. In fact, Short and Stein (2001) conclude their article with a number of unanswered questions, such as: do managers or faculty members have different views on the efficaciousness of the different models, and to what degree do the different models experience different types of barriers and challenges in their collaborative efforts?
An alternative perspective is provided by Birnbaum (1983) who suggested five types of collaborative activity:

1. **Collegial** – synergistic-type approach with institutions in this category working together collegially.
2. **Bureaucratic** – institutions in this category bring a bureaucratic approach to collaborative initiatives, with a focus on how activities will be co-ordinated between the participating institutions.
3. **Political** – describes situations where there is political incentive to collaborate, which may or may not be in the individual institution’s best interests.
4. **Anarchical** – institutions in this category are primarily focused on their own interests and their participation in collaborative activity is largely for tactical self interest.
5. **Cybernetic** – collaborative activities in this category have a focus on technology, for example, e-learning.

This categorising of collaborative activity presents a different approach with the focus of delineation being on the nature of the activity as opposed to the type of structure that is adopted for the model.

The perspective postulated by Birnbaum (1983) influenced the work of Plowman (1998) who, within the context of these five categories, explored the possible influence of the degree of contractual formality on collaborative activity. Plowman’s (1998) study suggested that there were other more influencing factors that institutions need to consider in collaborative arrangements than the formal agreement on which the arrangement was based. This was due to the insight that the effectiveness of the collaborative initiative was not solely determined by how ‘loosely’ or ‘closely’ the formal relationship was manifested among the participating institutions.

Another perspective on the degree of formality to apply to collaborative initiatives is provided by Thomas and Woodrow (2002) who suggested the following:

Almost there is an impression that to collaborate at all is the important thing and that how it is done is largely incidental. Hence the structures and strategies employed sometimes appear to
have developed almost accidentally rather than as a result of any conscious and informed choice between alternative patterns of collaboration (Thomas & Woodrow 2002, p. 3).

This suggests that participating institutions enter collaboration with little formal structures or a defined model in place; the nature and actual manifestation of the collaborative activity then unfolds in an almost organic nature.

The pros and cons of pure form or the ideal model of frameworks, forms and types of collaborative activity are also examined in the reviewed literature. This included an analysis of different types of models by Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000). From their analysis, there did not seem to be one overriding model that could easily be applied for most collaborative ventures. However, their analysis did suggest that it was suboptimal not to undertake an assessment of what might be an appropriate framework, form or model for the particular initiative being undertaken. In essence, while there does not seem to be a universal ‘instruction manual’ to ensure collaborative success, the authors imply that it is vital that institutions consider what could be the most appropriate model to use for their particular situation.

The concept of a normative framework was suggested by Brett (2000). This framework is based on the concept that institutions collaborate most effectively where they have the same values and rules, and recognise all participating organisations’ rights and obligations. This approach suggests that collaboration works best where there is no perceived threat of loss of control or identity and where individuals in the participating organisations work well together.

Other investigations into possible models of collaboration include Dhanaraj and Parkhe’s (2006) work on the manifestation of network orchestration and the impact of a leader to explore: “Not the strength of the bounds of collaboration rather the looseness of the couplings”, highlighting the interactivity between: “Knowledge mobility, innovation opportunity and network stability” (Dhanaraj & Parkhe 2006, p. 659). This study explored the additional complexity caused by individual personalities involved in the collaborative process. Dhanaraj and Parkhe (2006) also suggest a framework where one member of the network takes the lead to orchestrate the creation of value from the network’s activities.
The term ‘network’ is used by Tai-Young, Oh and Swaminathan (2006) in the context of institutional collaboration. These authors focused on the tensions created by changes to a network of organisations working collectively, specifically examining the constraints and difficulty of changing from existing relationships to new relationships. The notion of networks as a substitute for collaboration is a recurring feature of some management literature. An examination of network governance of institutions by Winkler (2006), and Ebers’ (1997) work on the formation of networks are good examples of this tendency. This concept is not so prevalent in more educationally focused journals and other publications.

This demarcation in the use of terminology amongst academic disciplines is not an absolute, as seen in Vangen’s (2003) use of the word ‘collaboration’ in his work on nurturing trust within institutional relationships. This work describes the various manifestations of collaboration in a commercial setting using the terms: joint ventures, strategic alliances, and workplace co-operatives. This variable interpretation of the word collaboration is also apparent in Huxham and Vangen (2001) in their discussion on the role of leadership in shaping institutional collaborative ventures. These examples suggest that the term ‘collaboration’ is not a precise term; it is used fairly freely in the reviewed literature and can encompass a range of meanings and descriptions.

While discussing the different paradigms within which collaboration can occur, Duke (2001) uses the term ‘networks’ in an applied educational setting. This network concept was an attempt to explain how co-operating tertiary institutions, within a funding environment that actively disincentives competition, tend to reduce their own individual diversity. The concept of institutional diversity is also explored by Jones (1996) who suggests that the more tertiary institutions co-operate, the less systemic diversity occurs within the network of co-operation. An alternative description of the term ‘networks’ is suggested by Hewitt (2000) in his discussion of inter-organisational relationships. In this discussion, Hewitt (2000) asserts the term ‘network’ is essentially a cliché to be defined and applied any way an institution chooses. One possible consequence of this usage is a potentially large gap between what is stated as a policy intention as opposed to what actually occurs in practice.
There is also a tension between the strategic intention of an institution exploring collaborative activity and the environmental context within which that strategic direction may be taking place (Koka, Madhavan & Prescott 2006). The authors go on to propose four patterns to describe network activity: expansion, churning, strengthening and shrinking. These patterns are cross referenced against changes in contextual uncertainty and changes in policy conduciveness to the institutions. This framework provides a possible guide to better understand how the building of effective collaborative arrangements is influenced by the duality of institutional intention and the prevailing sector context within which the activity occurs.

Another perspective on the concept of network in a collaborative setting is the notion of ‘inertia’ as a descriptor of the difficulty to get initial traction, which can occur when two institutions attempt to work together. Further discussion about the manifestation of inertia in inter-institutional collaboration is discussed in section 2.4.5 of this chapter. The idea of network inertia is potentially relevant in the current New Zealand context in terms of recent attempts to foster and encourage collaboration. Further, there is a possible link between this discussion of inertia theory within the research area of organisational ecology, for example, work on organisational structural change undertaken by Hannan and Freeman (1984). These authors explore inertia as a symptom rather than a by-product of institutional relationships.

The above discussion suggested that there was ample scope for further research into different models of collaboration to identify optimal structures and processes for successful collaborative activity. Much of the literature that was reviewed focused on identifying attributes of collaboration in an attempt to describe or categorise the different structures or approaches adopted by organisations when seeking to work collectively. This is possibly due to the loose application of the term collaboration, which seems to encompass a wide range of collective activities. Further, there appeared to be little assessment of the relative efficaciousness of different models or suggestions for the type of situation when particular models could be applied. This suggests the challenges associated with identifying a generic model that could be effective in any collaborative setting, particularly given the wide range of activities that the terms collaboration or network seem to encompass.
2.4.3 The basis of collaborative activity

Following the discussion about the different models or approaches institutions adopt for collaboration, the literature review turns to discussions on the basis for collaborative activity; that is, the motives or incentives from which institutions seek to work together on initiatives.

In their work on the importance of inter-organisational relationships, Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000) provide an interesting categorisation of institutional motivation to collaborate, namely: evangelism, pragmatism, market imperative and synergy.

1. Evangelism – is used to describe collaborative efforts that are driven by a sense of innate good. Institutions participate in the belief that only good outcomes can come from working together.

2. Pragmatism – is more aligned to the notion that collaborating makes good business sense. Examples of this are institutions working together to avoid duplication of resources such as buildings and technology.

3. Market imperative – institutions in this category collaborate to take advantage of an opportunity that has presented itself. In this situation, organisations believe that by working together they can make the most of the opportunity. An example of this would be institutions working to provide a new qualification course ahead of potential competitor organisations in response to legislative changes that require a profession to meet new qualification standards.

4. Synergy – describes a utopian situation where the contributing parties’ strengths and weaknesses dovetail to provide all of the critical success factors to make a collaborative venture successful. Under this category, the individual institutions alone would not have the attributes to make a venture successful; however, by working collectively they have all the required attributes to make the initiative succeed.

Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000) succinctly contrast the varying motivations that underlie collaboration; that is, whether collaboration is derived from good intention or as a result of market opportunities.
In his work on the structural determinants of institutional collaboration, Silverman (1995) suggests a possible fundamental basis for collaborative activity to occur, that is a common understanding of a shared problem. This is articulated as:

What is needed as consortia is developed is an understanding on the part of members of how their joint effort can address their shared problems – the process should be related to the homogeneity or commonalty of their goals, needs or purposes (Silverman 1995, p. 42).

A similar perspective is provided by Henderson (1990) who suggests: “A partnership formation has been described as coming together for mutually dependent actions, a process is as much socio-political as it is economic” (Henderson 1990, p. 25).

The notion of ‘shared need’ was also articulated by Kanter (1994) in her description of collaboration.

The partners need each other. They have complementary assets and skills. The partners invest in each other. They show tangible signs of long term commitment by devoting financial and other resources to the partnership. Partners share information required to make the relationship work. The relationship is given a formal status. It extends beyond the particular people who formed it, and cannot be broken on a whim (Kanter 1994, p. 38).

Thomas (2002) also examined the incentives for institutions to work together during collaborative activity, concluding that there was a strong cause and effect relationship between incentive and motivation to collaborate. Further, this suggests that there may be considerable benefit for this cause and effect relationship to be based around institutions that share similar systems, styles, and attributes not only to each other but also in their regard to the sector as a whole; playing their respective part in the network of tertiary education provision.

The nature and emphasis of strategic elements of collaboration for both financial and academic benefit are examined by Martin and Samels (1993-94). These authors suggest that the type of collective activity undertaken by institutions is informed by the financial pressures and market forces in the following quote: “Managing decline rather than seizing an education advantage has been the focus of traditional college and university mergers” (Martin & Samels
Another perspective is provided by Gnyawali and Madhavan (2001) who proposed that collaboration is seen as a distinct strategic lever to aid management practice.

In his survey of Australian higher education sector collaborative relationships Mahoney (1990) concluded that collaboration did not tend to develop unless incentivised tacitly or explicitly by government policy. This is a perspective supported by Codling and Meek (2006) who suggested that: “A higher education system will not develop in a particular way unless deliberate steps are taken to co-ordinate the system and the institutions within it.” (Codling & Meek 2006, p. 19). In a discussion of public health contingency planning in Alberta, Canada Moore et al (2006) highlighted the need to keep a watchful eye on the political perspective in collaboration. This discussion suggested the notion of a ‘brake’ being put on collaborative activities that are centrally driven, largely due to the realities of government-related institutions having to keep an eye, at all times, on the government and its agents.

Another perspective on the role of central agencies in influencing collaborative activity is provided by Vught (1989) who highlighted the difficulties for agencies in understanding the ‘opaque haze’ that seemingly surrounds tertiary institutional relationships, and how to effectively permeate that haze to constructively influence tertiary institutional behaviour. In contrast, the benefit for institutions to work together without the explicit external agency pressure to collaborate is examined by Arbuthnott and Bone (1993).

A case study on forced collaboration in Norway and the corresponding reaction from academic staff was provided by Kyvik (2002). In this study, the forced merger of tertiary institutions was undertaken to achieve financial efficiencies and improve educational outcomes across the system, and was based on geographic proximity and similarities between institutions. Kyvik’s (2002) study suggested that resistance to change by academic staff was derived from a desire to protect the status quo along with concerns about the loss of culture and institutional character of the institutions involved. The study was inconclusive about whether the planned economies of scale and enhanced outcomes were achieved from the merger. Further, the study suggested that structural change in itself does not bring about the behaviour change required to make this type of collaborative activity effective.
Codling and Meek (2006) also use biological concepts when examining institutional diversity, regarding tertiary institutions as organisms within the ecology of a higher education sector. Their discussion suggests that the more homogeneous the tertiary education system that exists within a country, the greater the tendency for sector diversity to be resisted unless there is active external policy intervention to encourage otherwise. According to Meek (2001): “In examining modes of co-ordination, it is the dynamics and complexities of the higher education policy and the structure of higher education systems which is at issue” (Meek 2001, p. 2). These authors also propose that in a challenging operating climate more adaptation is required, while an absence of environmental pressure can result in a tendency to replicate previously proven modes of operation. This is succinctly summarised by Geiger (1996) in his statement “Hard times encourage diversity” (Geiger 1996, p. 200). Geiger (1996) also aligns with the perspective of Codling and Meek (2006) in stating: “That is, more resources, more convergence” (Geiger 1996, p. 200). The influence of economic conditions on tertiary institutions’ conduciveness to collaboration or competition could be a subject worthy of further research; this is discussed again in section 5.8 of Chapter 5.

The literature that was reviewed about environmental influences on the motivation to collaborate suggested that tertiary education systems that feature a variety of institution types provide greater opportunity for ‘thinking outside the square’ to occur. This is the case in New Zealand, which has a binary system where institutions have either a more academic (university) or vocational (institute of technology/polytechnic) focus. In contrast, where there is a more unitary orientated tertiary system, the opportunities for systematic diversity are less likely (Codling & Meek 2006).

Competition within the tertiary education system, rather than encouraging new ways of doing business, has a tendency to incentivise co-operation among institutions according to Codling and Meek (2003). Long standing institution relationships can lead towards closer alignment which, in turn, may spawn collaborative ventures. However, in most cases new ways of doing business are internal to the tertiary institution rather than inter-institutional. This is potentially a lost opportunity given that successful innovation, in the way an institution undertakes its activity, can often be adopted by other institutions (Jones 1996). Jones (1996) also suggests that collaboration only occurs on a substantive basis when tertiary institutions are not struggling for students: “Generic co-operation can only occur in a deregulated environment
when institutions do not see themselves competing for funding and/or students” (Jones 1996, p. 86).

Another perspective was provided by Hewitt (2000), who looks at collaboration in the following way:

> The distinguishing feature of inter-organizational relationship is that they imply more than the hermetically sealed perfect market or bureaucracy. Indeed, inter-organizational relationships are often invoked as a response to market or bureaucratic failure. In this way, inter-organizational relationships are neither spontaneously co-ordinated by the price mechanism, like markets, nor authoritatively set by administrative fiat, like hierarchical forms of organization (Hewitt 2000, p. 51).

This quote mirrors to some extent the market imperative descriptor perspective provided by Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000) discussed earlier in this section. Further, it emphasises an emergent and iterative process where the final direction and outcome may well be quite different to the original intention. The concept of unintended consequences resulting from collaboration is reinforced by Abbott’s (1996) study of amalgamations in the Australian state of Victoria in the 1970s and 1980s.

Contemplating the literature reviewed about the motivation to collaborate raised a question around whether there is a trade-off or tension between forced and voluntary collaboration to achieve efficacious activity. Martin (1996) describes the impact when collaboration was imposed upon tertiary institutions with at best mediocre results. In contrast, there are also numerous examples of voluntary collaboration working effectively. This is the case with Parkyn (1999) who provides an example of diverse organisations (one a small rural college, the other a larger urban university) joining forces to facilitate improving learning opportunities and outcomes. Another example is provided by Kuh and Robinson (1995) in their investigation of the merger of two seminaries.

In summary, the reviewed literature identified numerous factors that influence the basis or motivation for tertiary education institutions to consider working together collaboratively. From responding to external influences, to capitalising on market opportunities and sharing resources to create operating efficiencies or learner benefits, there are many reasons why
institutions seek to enter collaborative initiatives. The reviewed literature examined both the potential benefits institutions seek to gain in creating collaborative opportunities as well as the environmental pressures that result in institutional collaboration.

2.4.4 Attributes for successful collaborative activity

After considering the factors that lead institutions to enter collaboration, the literature review now examines attributes that influence the success of collaborative activity.

The researcher’s investigation started in this subject area with Short and Stein (2001) who suggested the following elements as being essential for effective collaboration: mutual vision, support and commitment. The emphasis here is on ‘soft’, value based factors rather than attributes related to planning, resource allocation or project management. The authors also highlighted potential barriers to collaborative success, including ‘turf protection’ and the different perspectives that staff in different areas of an institution can have of collaborative activity. Short and Stein (2001) concluded by suggesting that further research could be undertaken to identify the relative success rates of different collaborative models.

Another perspective on characteristics for collaborative success was provided by Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000) who listed: the ability to overcome hurdles and barriers to the collaboration; having clearly identified and defined benefits to be derived from the collaboration; ensuring protagonists for the initiative are in place; and identifying measures of success for the activity before it is undertaken. The authors emphasised the importance of understanding the purpose and priority associated with the collaborative initiative to optimise the institution’s preparation to engage with the other partnering institutions.

A check list of factors for maximising the likelihood of collaborative success was proposed by Thomas and Woodrow (2002), which is abridged and listed below.

1. Shared vision – the collaborative partners have an agreed common outcome.
2. Agreed strategy and aligned incentives – the collaborating organisations have a clear and detailed understanding of how the initiative will be implemented and the varying roles of each organisation.
Taking a pragmatic approach in situations where there is short term benefit – adopting a direct vertical collaboration approach for relatively self-contained project-type initiatives, for example, shared purchasing arrangements.

Effective partner selection – consideration is given to who best to partner with rather than simply partnering with institutions that are available.

Senior management commitment – active commitment, rather than simply rhetoric, across the senior management team.

Prioritisation – ensuring there is a focus on activity that is critical to the success of the venture, over and above all other activities that need to be done.

Targets and success indicators— the presence of clear outcomes and indicators for the collaborative venture, stressing the ability to measure the benefit rather than merely describe it. From this action derives the ability to learn, with new knowledge applied to future endeavours.

This list reflects factors suggested by Ramsbottom and Baus (1999) in their examination of attributes for successful collaborative activity, which are abridged and listed below.

1. Leadership and commitment from the highest level;
2. A clear mission and goals;
3. A means to ensure participating organisations have equal value even if the parties are of different size and scale, and their contributions are not equal;
4. Commitment and buy in;
5. Sufficient authority to act and make decisions;
6. Having a neutral third party to facilitate and mediate;
7. Seed funding to establish the initiative and ensure the required resources are available at an early stage;
8. Agreements in respect of cost sharing;
9. Mechanisms to track success;
10. Effective communications;
11. Flexibility and the ability to experiment.
This comprehensive list encompasses factors associated with assets, resources, attitudes and intentions. The authors were the first of those reviewed to highlight the potential role of a third party to facilitate and/or project manage the initiative.

Another perspective was provided by Kezar (2005) who talked about a three-stage model. The stages in the model are:

1. Building commitment across values where senior management manifest and model supportive behaviour;
2. External pressures impacting on institutions;
3. Learning and networks amongst institutions.

This model takes a high level approach to identifying attributes for success that encompass some of the factors discussed by other authors. Further, the model emphasises the role of central agencies, which Kezar (2005) suggested had a significant influence on collaborative activity, in both a potentially positive or negative sense.

In his review of the planning for the tri-lateral University of Detroit Mercy, Burkhardt (1994) highlighted the tendency for institutions to focus on securing external support, particularly from central agencies, while gaining internal support seemed to be downplayed.

Another high level approach to grouping success factors was provided by Martin and Samels (1993-94) who describe the following five broad steps for effective mergers that also resonate with collaborative activity:

1. Institutional self-assessment – undertaking a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis of the institution before entering collaborative activity to identify issues that need addressing.
2. Strategic planning – considering the purpose of the collaborative activity and how it relates to the institution’s wider strategic direction and priorities.
3. Negotiation – undertaking dialogue with the institutions involved to gain common understanding and agreement on key aspects of the collaboration.
4. Implementation – ensuring the implementation reflects the identified goals and is undertaken in a way that maintains goodwill amongst the parties involved.

5. Consolidation and development – taking a long-term view of the collaborative activity; learning from past experience and accepting that there will be hurdles that need overcoming along the way.

These authors go on to describe collaborative relationships as manifestations of: “Friction, turf protection and abrasive behaviour” (Martin & Samels 1993-94, p. 33), and propose that these manifestations can be overcome by a combination of institutional goodwill, delicate negotiations and perseverance. The recognition that effective collaboration takes time was also reflected by Arbuthnott and Bone (1993).

The connection between collaboration and merger activity is also examined by Rowley (1997) in her study of mergers in the United Kingdom. One of the major findings of this study was that while collaboration and mergers have similar attributes, they are not on the same continuum; the former is not necessarily a stepping stone to the latter. This is an important distinction stressed by the author who also considered that one activity does not preclude the other; that is, a merger could possibly follow collaborative activity. In contrast, Lang (2002) considers that: “…the origins and motivations of inter-institutional co-operation… show that the various forms of co-operation, including merger, are part of a single evolutionary continuum” (Lang 2002, p. 154).

Along with Harman (2000), Rowley (1997) identified there would invariably be areas of dispute associated with inter-institutional activity. Harman (2000) suggests clarity of purpose and agreed objectives as key attributes in securing an outcome that would make the transactional costs and effort worth the negative aspects associated with collaboration.

The mechanisms that might impact collaboration were further examined by Sargent and Waters (2004) who stressed the context of collaboration and interpersonal relationships as two major influencers. The context for the collaboration encompassed the political climate and the financial pressures facing the participating institutions, while the authors’ assessment of inter-personal relationships focused on issues associated with communication, trust, and compatibility between key individuals.
Collectively, the reviewed literature suggested there were significant risks associated with undertaking collaborative initiatives, particularly in regard to activities involving participating institutions that were of different size, status and nature. This was particularly apparent when collaboration was inter-sectorial, that is universities working collaboratively with polytechnics or institutes of technology.

An influencing factor in mitigating these potential risks was the degree of trust that existed between the participating parties. In an environment of mistrust, the risks associated with the collaborative activity were higher; conversely, where there was a considerable degree of trust between the parties, there was also a greater likelihood of addressing and managing potential risks. This suggests that the ability to engender trust or work effectively within an environment of mistrust is an important factor in enhancing the likelihood of collaborative success. This is an approach reflected by Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998) in their study into the role played by trust as a foundation stone for effective collaboration. This study examined why and how people trust as a basis for co-operation within and across institutions, and suggests that leaders learn how to manage distrust given that institutional relationships can be plagued by individuals ‘second guessing’ the underlying motives and agendas associated with the collaborative activity.

Further, within this concept of trustworthiness there seems to be an underlying element of a sense of obligation to the other party. This sentiment, alongside a common value orientation and a commitment to talk rather than threaten exit while addressing concerns, represent key ingredients for successful relationship building. There is also a recurring emphasis on the benefit of working within an overriding umbrella of a ‘spirit of goodwill’ (Podolny & Page 1998).

A different perspective on attributes of success was provided by authors that focused on factors contributing to collaborative failure. These authors included Kuh and Robinson (1995) who provided five elements that were evident in tertiary inter-institutional relationship failure, which are paraphrased and listed below.
1. Different ways of doing business;
2. Lack of trust;
3. Insufficient incentive to change how things are currently done;
4. Lack of alignment between participating institutions;
5. Lack of recognition of ‘soft’ factors such as compatibility between leaders and common values.

This list further reflects the importance of trust along with a willingness to change existing modes of operation to enhance collaborative success. The list also suggests the significance of strong inter-personal relationships between key individuals and the importance of aligning institutional values and norms. The importance of similarity in organisational culture and values is reflected in the following quotation:

Where organisational culture and traditions are very dissimilar, possibilities for the creation and reward and fruitful contacts are much smaller than in those cases where different universities and persons share a common set of norms and values (Kyvik 2002, p. 70).

Collaboration is often described in the reviewed literature as a vital undertaking by tertiary institutions. However, the literature also indicates that institutional experience can be cast in expressions of resource hungry and stereotypical role playing between participants; dismissing the initial positive intention of collaboration when up against the harsh realities of practical, real experiences (Kuh & Robinson 1995). An example of this is the tendency within collaborative activity to establish how the spoils of collaboration would be best distributed amongst the participants, rather than taking an integrative and problem solving approach that might ensure all participants gain. The difficulty of creating favourable conditions for institutions to work together is examined by Humpal (1971), who referred to differences in size, scale and institutional complexity as barriers to collaborative success.

In summary, the literature that was reviewed considered a wide range of attributes that could influence the success of a collaborative venture, including suggested enablers and disenablers for effective collaboration. Most authors referred to both ‘hard’ (factual, physical) and ‘soft’ (value based) enablers for collaborative ventures. None of the authors suggested that their checklist was a guarantee for success or that each and every attribute is required to establish collaborative activity on a sound footing. Indeed, Short and Stein (2001) discuss the lack of
consensus on core characteristics for successful collaboration. There was, however, an emerging theme that suggested that without a soft, value-based orientation, which is shared among key participants, collaborative activity is unlikely to be successful in the long term.

In addition, there was a recurring theme of the importance of sound inter-personal relationships and the need for key individuals to get along (Kezar 2005; Martin & Samels 1993-94; Rowley 1997; Sargent & Waters 2004). This suggested that unless there is a degree of leadership compatibility, collaboration amongst institutions will struggle to succeed. Assessment of the indicators or requisite attributes influencing collaborative success was relatively consistent across all the jurisdictions reviewed (largely United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada), and whether the collaborative activity was business or educational in orientation. Issues of nomenclature are a frequent theme, as is the trade-off between intent and the practical reality that emerges as the collaborative ‘idea’ is being operationalised.

Amidst the range of possible attributes or enablers that were cited in the literature, there was little discussion about the relative importance of the preparation phase of collaboration; the extent to which preparation, or lack of, contributed to the ‘readiness’ for the collaborative process or its resulting outcome. This aspect is discussed in the next section.

2.4.5 Collaborative preparation and institutional readiness

As highlighted at the end of previous section, the literature that was reviewed for this research contained relatively little discussion about the preparation phase of collaboration; that is, the phase between idea generation (basis or motivation) and implementation (models), and the activities that could be undertaken during this stage to enhance the likelihood of success (attributes).

Daigle and Robinson (2000) stood out in the literature as providing a conceptual framework of institutional readiness in their study about reforming the California State University network. This framework incorporated the dimensions of readiness and lessons learnt, and outlined a proposed critical path for institutions to follow as they contemplate collaborative activity. The framework also provides a mechanism to investigate both the obvious and more
subtle elements of an institutional readiness to collaborate – the distinction between rhetoric and reality.

In her study of mergers in Great Britain, Rowley (1997) advanced a number of key drivers in preparing for effective collaborative activity, which are listed below in descending order of importance:

1. Compatibility between parties;
2. Commitment to a long term relationship;
3. Considered thought being given to partner selection;
4. External influences (such as political influence) actively encourage the activity;
5. Positive and mutual respect amongst participants.

This raised some pertinent questions about how institutions select the organisation to partner with. How easy is it to pick and choose potential collaborating institutions and what is the relative importance of institutions being willing and available, rather than willing and in a ready state for collaboration to occur? It was considered that this, and other questions related to preparation for institutional collaboration, were worthy of further investigation.

The notion of compatibility between the collaborative partners advanced by Rowley (1997) above was also discussed by Mahoney (1990), who highlighted the importance of acknowledging the distinctive cultures that exist within the participating institutions. Mahoney suggested that no matter how homogenous the institutions might appear on the surface, the differences between values and customs between the parties could create issues and tensions during the collaborative process.

The following key steps for institutional readiness were suggested by Adler, Heckscher and Prusack (2011):

1. Define and build a shared purpose;
2. Cultivate an institutional culture of contribution;
3. Develop scalable and inter-dependent processes for co-ordinating efforts;
4. Create an infrastructure in which collaboration is valued and rewarded.
The extent to which tertiary institution managers consider and adapt research and learnings related to collaboration when preparing to enter new collaborative ventures is explored by Deem (2006) who suggests that leaders tend to draw on personal experiences rather than access research. This suggested the potential benefits of collating the direct experiences of leaders into a body of knowledge and widely disseminating this knowledge to ensure these learnings could be productively applied during the preparative stage of future collaborative endeavours. This notion further advanced the process of identifying both gaps in the existing body of knowledge as well as the methodology to be adopted for this study.

A further perspective on the concepts explored by Deem (2006) are provided by Abele (2011) who suggests that an important aspect of institutional readiness is the willingness to accept that there are other ways of doing things. This willingness to be open to different approaches and activities aids in ensuring the institution is best placed to undertake collaborative initiatives that will inevitably require some change in operational structures and modes in order to be sustainable and effective.

Arbuthnott and Bone (1993) and Breuder (1996) describe a three-dimension point of reference to characterise tertiary institutional relationships, which are listed below. The first dimension listed does contemplate the role of ‘pre-relationship planning’. The three dimensions include:

1. Strategic purpose of the institutional relationship;
2. Relationship warmth between the institutions – described interestingly in the language of romance, for example, ‘courtship’;
3. How intense the integration, for example, the pace of activity and its respective impact on the institutions and individuals involved.

Stumbling blocks faced by institutions during collaboration included how institutions reconcile self-interest and short-sighted behaviour along with conflict about values (Thomas & Woodrow 2002). This realisation of the difficulty of moving from idea to implementation, and how hard it is to ensure that collaboration utilises the strengths and mitigates the
weaknesses of participating institutions, is seemingly often recognised in hindsight rather
than being espoused as a potential issue at the beginning of collaborative activity.

A concept that emerged from the literature in relation to institutional readiness was the issue
of institutional inertia and how best to pinpoint the attributes of institutional forces that
inhibit progress in respect to collaborative ventures. Tai-Young, Oh and Swaminathan (2006)
examine this concept in their study into how multiple institutions reflect on their respective
actions as their institutional networks attempt to change. This included the tendency for
institutions to resist the formation, change, replacement, and even the removal of existing
collaborative relationships with other institutions.

The concept of resistance and institutional collaboration features strongly in the interaction
between management and sociology as captured in Gulati and Garguilo’s (1999) work on
inter-organisational networks. In his discussion on the dynamics of institutional relationships,
Ebers (1999) explores the constraints put on new collaborations from the existing
collaborative activities of the relevant institutions.

Tai-Young, Oh and Swaminathan (2006) also outlined four types of segmentation that could
be used to filter institutional resistance to change relationships from one institution to
another. Although the original application is for network change, it has the utility to be
applied to the establishment of collaborative ventures and builds on the work of Scott (2005).
The four constraints identified by Scott (2005) on an institution’s collaborative efforts are:

1. Internal or intra-organisational – the difficulties of managing change while establishing a
   new way of doing things.
2. Network tie specific – the situation where two organisations are so closely linked to each
   other that they resist the addition of subsequent organisations to a collaborative venture.
3. Network position specific – the existing network has no incentive to seek or agree to
   additional participants.
4. External – forces external to the network are positively or negatively disposed to changes
   in the network, for example, the central funding body does not want to fund the cost of
   additional institutions being involved in the collaborative venture.
Daigle and Robinson (2000) provided further insights on this issue including the following:

Partnerships have cultural and procedural implications as well as financial and economic ones….an institution must be willing to make needed changes to its own operation, rethink partnership objectives, or even change partners (Daigle & Robinson 2000, p. 29).

The issues outlined in the discussion above suggest that it takes more than a good idea and initial willingness to ensure an institution is in a position to establish and implement a collaborative venture. Grouping the summary of influences impacting a tertiary institution’s preparation (or otherwise) for collaboration and contrasting it with a list of external factors as outlined in Table 2.1 below. The table is adapted from Codling and Meek (2006, p. 19).

Table 2.1 Preparation factors that promote or do not promote collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Preparation for collaboration IS promoted by</th>
<th>Preparation for collaboration IS NOT promoted by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Sense of heterogeneity</td>
<td>Sense of homogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Intervention – policy encourages or incentivises institutions to collaborate</td>
<td>Lack of strong policy to encourage or incentivise collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Binary network – a system typified by a variety of institution types</td>
<td>Unitary network - a system typified by similar styles of institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Incentives and rewards for successful outcomes</td>
<td>Incentives and rewards for participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Low demand for competitive behaviour in the network</td>
<td>High demand for competitive behaviour in the network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Codling and Meek (2006, p. 19).
As suggested in the table above, the more tertiary institutions are alike, the less likely incentives will exist to collaborate. The converse proposition suggests that the greater the variation of institutions within the tertiary system, the more fertile the ground is for rethinking how tertiary institutions might interact.

In summary, while some of the reviewed authors recognised and discussed the relative importance of preparation for collaboration and the concept of institutional ‘readiness’, the literature review highlighted the opportunity for further research into this aspect of inter-institutional collaboration.

2.4.6 The role of leaders in collaborative activity

What is the relative role and influence of leaders within collaborative activity and how has the literature approached this issue? In a discussion about generic management styles, Ibarra and Hansen (2011) identified three approaches to leadership: command and control, consensus, and collaboration. This is illustrated in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 Three styles of leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Command and Control</th>
<th>Consensus</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Structure</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Intra-institutional</td>
<td>Intra-institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Institution wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Best</td>
<td>Defined hierarchy</td>
<td>Small team</td>
<td>Shared goals and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Poorly</td>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>Inter-institutional</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted for this research from Ibarra & Llansen (2011), p.73.
Ibarra and Hansen (2011) go on to suggest that in order to secure planned collaboration, or be well placed to respond to collaborative opportunities, leaders need to take the following approach which has been adapted and listed as follows:

1. Think outside, not inside, the institution;
2. Recruit employees that have the skills and attitude conducive to collaboration;
3. Model constructive external relationships;
4. Overtly champion the collaborative initiatives that are undertaken.

Ibarra and Hansen (2011) suggest that leadership style has a significant influence on collaborative initiatives, both in terms of the likelihood of collaborative opportunities being pursued and in regards to the effectiveness of any initiatives that are implemented.

Another perspective on the influence of leadership styles is provided by Abele (2011) who suggests collaboration is a natural by-product of leaders who are:

1. Passionately curious;
2. Modest confidence;
3. Mildly obsessed.

Other manifestations of this leadership style include leading by influence rather than authority, not giving orders, and never assuming that they, or their institution, have all the answers. This suggests a willingness to change and a possible acceptance of institutional vulnerability that are potentially pre-requisites to meaningful collaboration. It also suggests a move away from traditional ‘command and control’ approaches to leadership, possibly providing greater capacity for collective ownership and accountability without a clear hierarchy of authority. Alternative approaches to the role of leaders in a collaborative setting is provided by Schein (1971) who considers that leadership intervention can be effective in both a spontaneous and more structured manner.
Arbuthnott and Bone (1993) reinforce the notion suggested by Deem (2006) that prior experience was a major influence on leadership practice. Further, the authors emphasise that the attitude of key players in the participating institutions was significant in determining the extent and nature of any collaborative initiatives.

In his work on alliances, Kanter (1994) stressed that collaborative relationships were formed primarily as a result of personal interaction rather than from formal transactions. The author goes on to suggest the importance of associated values and beliefs in this type of collective activity. This emphasis on people rather than business is further articulated by Kezar (2005):

> Higher education institutions do not appear to advance through development based on learning, but based on well developed relationships… Grass roots efforts and ownership are needed to create motivation. Members of the higher education context are likely motivated by people, more so than goals, management or rewards (Kezar 2005, p. 856).

This concept is further supported by Bergquist, Betwee and Meuel (1995) who state:

> Commitments range from handshakes to legally binding contracts. In the final analysis, the real issue boils down to one of mutual trust and interpersonal relationships, covenants (not contracts) lie at the heart of successful partnerships (Bergquist, Betwee & Meuel 1995, p. 187).

Winkler (2006) and Vangen (2003) address such elements as personal barriers, circumvention of personalities, how best to manage differences, and the issue of irresolvable differences in the values and goals associated with collaborative success. The authors propose that success was more likely to occur if leaders pay particular attention to keeping relevant stakeholders informed. Further, the authors suggest that this communication and engagement process focuses on highlighting the benefits and risks associated with the collaboration, rather than on specific details; this is to ensure that short term procedural issues do not detract from stakeholders understanding and supporting the longer term objectives.
Dialogue about the contribution leaders can make to collaborative activity included Burkhardt (1994) who commented that leaders must maintain momentum and build consensus to ensure collaborative success. Further Burkhardt (1994) refers to the: “Special courage, deep pragmatism, and many sensitive deliberations” (Burkhardt 1994, p. 19), that leaders must apply in the context of tertiary institutional merger activity. This suggests that success comes from resilience and determination by leaders, and finding a balance between zeal and pragmatism to get people on board.

Suggestions for approaches that leaders can follow to initiate and maintain collaborative momentum are provided by Daigle and Robinson (2000): “Full inclusion, communication, participation and constant feedback” (Daigle & Robinson 2000, p. 29). By following a full inclusion approach, the collaborative venture becomes a prime focus for leadership activity. Prioritising means that effectively all elements of institutional activity are in some way connected to the collaborative initiative. Active communication is used to both report to and prepare stakeholders for the collaborative initiative, while participation sees a concerted effort to involve stakeholders in order to enhance the degree of ownership in the venture. Constant feedback is suggested as an iterative process between those advancing the collaborative initiative and those on which the initiative significantly impacts.

The importance of ensuring collaborative activity is accorded a sense of priority within the participating institutions is echoed by Kezar (2005) who states:

> Although people believed that collaborations were best supported and successful when they emerged and had ownership throughout the organisation… collaborations usually did not maintain momentum if there was not a sense of priority among senior executives (Kezar 2005, p. 849).

In an analysis of collaboration in the nursing profession, Mann et al (1999) emphasised the importance of leaders bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality. The authors go on to stress the importance of individual responsibility of leaders within themselves and to their institutions in order to maintain and foster respectful working relationships with their colleagues.
The degree to which leadership can sustain momentum and support appears to be a vital attribute when considering collaborative activity often consists of unclear boundaries, conflicting priorities, different management processes and deliverables that are problematic to identify and monitor (Daigle & Robinson 2000). An associated consideration is the timeframe required for collaboration to be established and embedded in the participating institutions, a notion supported by Kezar (2005) in the following quote:

Move to collaboration as a long term and slow evolution. They realized it was not going to happen to overnight, but over many years. So, by taking time to put in the initial conditions in place was seen as a good investment of time (Kezar 2005, p. 856).

Another perspective on the timeframes associated with collaboration comes from Nohira and Eccles (1992) who suggest that effective collaborative networks will only come about if leaders understand how the associated relationships evolve and change over time.

In summary, the literature provided a range of perspectives on the role of leaders in inter-institutional collaborative activity. Recurring themes encompassed the importance of personal relationships over formal business structures, highlighting the inter-personal compatibility of leaders in a collaborative setting. The willingness to adapt and accommodate other approaches, weighting co-operation over control, was also recognised as important leadership attributes, along with the need to generate momentum and keep stakeholders informed and involved throughout the collaborative process. An emerging theme from the literature is the concept of collaboration as a leadership style, as reflected in the following quote from Benkler (2011): “… a preponderance to want to work together and collaboration is an emerging leadership trait” (Benkler 2011, p. 77).

Distinguishing attributes of this style include the willingness to loosen control without losing control, and acceptance of the lengthy and non-linear nature of collaborative activities. The first notion is reflected in the following quote from Clark (1983): “Carry the field rather than command it” (Clark 1983, p. 236). Ensuring leadership actions mirror words when promoting collaboration within the organisation are also given emphasis, particularly in terms of ensuring collaborative initiatives are given the requisite priority within the institution’s wider operations.
2.4.7 Analytical summary

The literature that was reviewed for this research examined a wide range of concepts and issues related to the subject area of inter-institutional collaboration. This included the reasons why institutions seek to work collectively (basis) along with the type of approaches and structures that are applied to collaborative activity (models). It also included the factors and attributes that influence the success of collaborative activity along with the role that leaders play in the collaborative process, and the degree to which institutions consciously take steps to prepare for collaboration. The literature review also touched on wider aspects of collaboration as part of the process of refining the scope of the research subject area, identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge, and defining the research problem. This included inquiries into inter-institutional relationships between tertiary education institutions and industry.

An interesting feature of the literature was the wide range of approaches taken to examine these different aspects of collaboration. In order to identify common attributes or manifestations between different case studies of collaboration, a number of authors have applied an approach described by the researcher as ‘categorisation’. This approach centres on describing the type of structure or distinguishing features of collaborative initiatives and is typified by the work of Thomas and Woodrow (2002), Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000), Short and Stein (2001), Plowman (1998), Lang (2002) and Codling and Meek (2006). In contrast, Daigle and Robinson (2000) favour approaching collaboration via the application of descriptive frameworks to sort and make observations about any associated collaborative activity. This framework provides a check-list to ease the comparison between institutions’ collaborative activities; effectively it forms taxonomy to aid this comparison as well as enabling judgements to be made about the efficacious extent of an institution’s foray into collaboration.

Amidst this discussion about different models or ways of categorising and labelling collaborative initiatives, there seemed to be little assessment of the relative merits of the different models or the criteria for when a particular model would be most suitable. Thomas and Woodrow (2002) do stand out from the reviewed literature in suggesting that determining which model is best is influenced by a number of factors. This included whether the
collaboration was vertical or horizontal; that is, whether it took place within the institution; with ‘feeders’ to the institution, for example, a high school from which students could progress to a university; or with other institutions. It also included whether the proposed collaboration was a relatively contained joint activity or required major change to each of the participating institutions, and whether the initiative was short term or a longer term activity. It also encompassed the degree to which the collaborative initiative would result in changes to the institutional autonomy or identity of the organisations involved. Thomas and Woodrow (2002) summarised their assessment by citing: “In conclusion, there is no one model that is ‘best buy’” (Thomas & Woodrow 2002, p. 23).

An extension of the ‘categorisation’ approach to analysing collaboration is works that use some form of typology to assess institutions’ collaborative efforts and possibly their readiness for collaborative activity. This includes authors who have examined the attributes that are potential success factors or hallmarks of failure in inter-institutional collaboration. Authors in this category include Thomas and Woodrow (2002), Ramsbottom and Baus (1999), Martin and Samels (1993-94), Rowley (1997), Daigle and Robinson (2000), Kezar (2005), Sargent and Waters (ref), Arbuthnott and Bone (1993) and Kuh and Robinson (1995), along with Silverman (1995) who provides a succinct list of key requirements or ‘enablers’ for effective collaboration.

Amidst these different approaches to examining, assessing and describing collaborative activity, there appeared to be no existing generic framework or reference to theoretical models that was widely accessed and adopted by tertiary education institutions contemplating collaboration. This suggests that there was an opportunity to contribute to existing knowledge into this subject area, particularly in the New Zealand setting where there is little research into inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector.

A potentially influencing factor in the challenges associated with analysing collaboration is the wide range of activity the term seems to encompass. As discussed in section 2.4.2, ‘collaboration’ and ‘networks’ are terms that are used relatively loosely to describe a range of initiatives, possibly adding to the complexity associated with categorising, understanding and indeed practicing collaboration.
In reviewing the prevailing literature, the researcher found limited research that focused on how tertiary education institutions prepare for collaborative ventures. Existing research largely concentrated on the motivation or idea generation phase for ventures and/or on the implementation stage. In fact, the research often suggested that institutions had a tendency to move rapidly between these phases with little thought given to how best to prepare to maximise the opportunity for success. The researcher considered that investigating the broader area of inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector could provide rich insights into factors that institutions could consider, and actions they could undertake, at the preparatory stage that could subsequently influence how effective the collaboration process was and the outcome of the collaborative venture itself.

The literature review raised some further questions:

1) What are the benefits and drawbacks of different forms of collaboration?
2) What can institutions do to prepare for and facilitate collaboration?
3) What are the main barriers to effective collaboration?
4) What tools and techniques can be applied to build capability and influence constructive outcomes?
5) What are the metrics that can assist in monitoring success, failure, progress and stagnation?

The researcher was also interested in the methodologies applied by authors in their research into inter-institutional collaboration. Amidst the range of methodologies used to examine the subject area, there was little research that drew on the personal experiences of tertiary education leaders in the collaborative ventures they had been involved in. This area was identified as a gap in the body of knowledge and became a major focus for this study. An aspect of focusing on leadership experience was the possible link between good collaborative leadership and good management practice in general. In reviewing the literature, the researcher considered the applicability of broader leadership skills in leading collaborative initiatives and whether there were specific attributes or skills that were particularly relevant to this type of business activity.
From analysing the literature that was reviewed and following further contemplation, the researcher defined the research problem to be addressed by this study as:

1. What is the experience of institutional leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?

Having identified the main research problem that this study seeks to address, the researcher turned to selecting the most appropriate theoretical framework and research methodology to undertake this research.

2.5 Theoretical framework and research methodology

2.5.1 Introduction

As well as identifying gaps in the body of knowledge that were worthy of further investigation, a range of literature was also reviewed to select the most appropriate theoretical framework and research methodology to address the emerging areas of research. A theoretical framework is the theoretical context within which research tools and techniques are bounded and applied to the research problem or new knowledge the study is investigating (Herson & Lawrence 1984).

This section provides an overview of the process undertaken to identify the theoretical framework that would be most effective in addressing the selected research areas. It also provides a description of the selected research methodology of grounded theory. Details about the other research methodologies that were considered for this study are discussed in section 3.2 of Chapter 3.
2.5.2 Theoretical framework selection

A number of theoretical frameworks were considered for this study. These included frameworks that had been used in previous research into the broad subject area of collaboration as well as those researched in their own right during the literature review.

As well as proposing some models of collaborative activity Daigle and Robinson (2000) also advance a more theory-oriented conceptual framework that segments the manner in which institutions collaborative activity emerges and provides a possible road map for institutions to follow along their respective journey.

The development sequence of partnership formation and the factors required to make it successful include vision, commitment, culture, risk, power and adaptability. The first three are contextual in nature and form the fabric of ideas, assumptions and values that underlie the partnership efforts. The last three are more action orientated and address the concrete substance of the partnership itself (Daigle & Robinson 2000, p. 22).

This suggests that preparation for collaboration is more likely to succeed when it is organic and reflects a way of doing business, rather than when it is imposed or undertaken as a means to satisfy external factors. Daigle and Robinson (2000) sourced their ‘action content’ from Bailey (1968) and his theories of public administration, which were:

1. Descriptive-explanatory – looking for patterns in the data;
2. Normative – comparing collected data against a set reference point;
3. Assumptive – data contributions are treated as self evident truths;
4. Instrumental – the utility of the data is strongly linked to its accuracy.

This structure would have provided a systematic filter to capture and reflect underlying propositions, values, beliefs, norms and assumptions to better understand an institution’s actual and perceived readiness to collaborate.

Other frameworks that had been used in existing research into collaboration included a bargaining/distribution framework that progresses to an integrative problem solving approach that had been utilised by Fenwick (2006), Silverman (1995) and Duke (2001).
Bargaining/distribution purports to explain interactions using a series of continually evolving negotiations. Each negotiation leads to a dissemination of information, which in turn creates the next stage of negotiations. In a collaborative setting this approach would see participating institutions over the length of a collaborative initiative engage to investigate, develop and implement a new collective initiative. At each stage, the interactions between the participating institutions reflect iterative discussions that dictate the pace and scope of the initiative being developed. At each interaction there is the opportunity to renegotiate the arrangement and if that occurs a new ‘bargain’ has been struck.

The concept of an inquiry paradigm is cited in Creamer (2003) with the original source being Guba and Lincoln (1994). An inquiry paradigm is another research technique to aid how research is undertaken that promotes the concept that research should be conducted within a specific context. Creamer (2003) also outlined a possible framework that allows individuals who hold varying world views to collaborate in an effective fashion. This is based on the notion of ‘basic philosophical orientation’ where individuals have an innate sense of working collaboratively. In addition, Creamer (2003) has undertaken a typology of the inquiry paradigms and applied this to the collaborative process. The typologies included encompass positivists, post positivists, critical theories and constructivist, which were also originally sourced from Guba and Lincoln (1994).

A positivist approach is hypothesis-orientated and brings as much objectivity to the research problem as possible. Post-positivism incorporates the perspective that pure objectivism is unrealistic in that there is always some element of subjectivity influencing the research approach. Critical theories take a more provocative approach in promoting the premise that the researcher’s personal views and values can form a central theme within the research activity. For example, rather than being a factual dispassionate explanation, critical theory brings a construct of intellectual advocacy and even a moral tone of revealing wrongs buried within conventional thinking. In contrast, constructivism is where there is free acknowledgement of the subjectivity of research. Further, constructivism advocates that subjectivity does not in itself invalidate the robustness of research as long as the subjectivity is acknowledged. In short, Creamer’s (2003) work suggests that the more the research area requires an understanding of the dynamics within a research problem that is centred on collaborative processes, the more apt a constructivist inquiry paradigm becomes.
Then there are frameworks that examine the ways of acting and ways of thinking. These frameworks recognise and examine the distinction between intentions and actions of both institutions and leaders within those institutions. This ties in with Hewitt (2000) who describes three levels of analysis for entering organisational collaboration, which as been adapted into the following forms:

1. Actors – both individual and institutional and the part they play within any stage of collaborative activity;
2. Legacy – the degree of pre-existing interaction between individuals and institutions and the consequences, both positive and negative, on subsequent collaborative activity;
3. Context – the prevailing wider sector influencers that may impact, either negatively or positively, on institutional collaboration.

A different perspective on linkages between players within collaborative activity is provided by Hardy, Lawrence and Grant (2005) who assert the importance of exploring the linkages and interactivity between discourse theory and institutional collaboration. By discourse theory, the authors are attempting to delve and understand how language influences activity rather than merely records it. This not only relates to the fact that there are interactions between ‘actors’ within collaborative activity, but also to the language and the emotions behind those interactions (Tai-Young, Oh & Swaminathan 2006).

An alternative framework to apply to qualitative research within a tertiary education setting is advanced by Crowson (1987). This framework provides an overview of possible definitions of higher education institutional relationships including:

1. Loose coupling – situations where the institutions are engaged in collaborative activity but not formally linked by contractual type arrangements;
2. Organised anarchy – circumstances where formal arrangements are in place yet the collaborative activity is more of an adventure than a reflection of a planned work programme;
3. Organisational culture – institutions have an operating model that is conducive to working with other organisations;
4. Organisational socialisation – situations where institutions easily find common protocols to normalise the new ways of working collaboratively;

5. Institutional myths – situations where ‘memories’ of previous collaborative activity, whether factual or not, bring a degree of influence to any current or planned collaborative initiatives.

6. Organisational learning – previous activity constructively informs how current and future activity may be undertaken.

Further, Crowson (1987) provides a map to follow in the application of qualitative research into a tertiary institutional setting:

1. Guiding principles of qualitative research methodology;
2. Methodological issues in the application of that research;
3. Consideration in respect to the implementation of qualitative research.

The relationships and behaviours outlined by Crowson’s (1987) framework of definitions coupled with his proposed map suggest that as research probes into the dynamics and intricacies of institutions’ relationships, there is benefit to reflect on, rather than merely record, what is being uncovered. This suggested that there was considerable advantage to add to knowledge by ‘grounding out’ theories from data as opposed to selecting a possible hypothesis and undertaking research to test that hypothesis.

Collectively this material suggested the notion of shifting the focus on institutional collaboration away from being a structural paradigm, albeit in varying manifestations, as a driver of collaborative activity. Rather, the nature of collaborative activity is more dependent on behavioural attributes of the various participants within the collaboration, no matter what model is being utilised. In looking at how best to gain insights into collaborative preparation and the role of leaders in this process, interviewing tertiary institution leaders about their experiences and views on the factors that influence success emerged as a potentially effective approach. Further, the researcher considered this approach could be optimised by undertaking a dialogue-based iteration with the interview participants, rather using a question and answer format. The purpose of this was to maximise the depth and richness of the participants’ contributions and minimise the constraints of taking an unduly structured approach.
The question then became which form of theoretical paradigm would provide the greatest depth of insight into New Zealand’s tertiary institutional collaborative activity: positivism, post positivism, critical theory or constructivist? The emphasis on dynamics rather than detail together with the familiarity the researcher had with the sector and some of the possible research participants reinforced that a constructivist paradigm would be the most optimal to adopt.

If a positivist approach had been undertaken, as articulated by (Glaser 1992), the researcher would have approached an inquiry with more objective prediction and control. This would have involved developing a hypothesis to be tested, leaning towards a cause-effect approach. Robustness would have come from proving or disproving a hypothesis, making analysis easier as there would be greater opportunity for identifying a right/wrong answer. The difficulty with this approach as supported by commentators such as Charmaz (2006) is that the researcher assumes an unrealistic stance of a dispassionate, aloof inquirer. It is unrealistic to suggest that any research can be undertaken through a pure and totally objective framework, particularly when the researcher is associated with the research topic, as in this study.

During the course of the literature review, it became apparent that a constructivist approach that focuses on situations, assumptions, tacit rules and events (Corbin & Strauss 1990; Strauss & Corbin 1994) would be the most appropriate approach to take. In contrast, a more objectivist tone would have placed greater emphasis on chronology, events and settings (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978).

Grounded theory, discussed in greater detail below, seemed to be the appropriate theoretical framework for capturing and analysing the personal experiences of tertiary institution leaders to form theories from which practical tools, tips and suggestions could be developed and disseminated within the sector.
2.5.3 Research methodology

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the literature review significantly informed the selection of an appropriate research methodology for this study. Details of the methodologies considered for this research are outlined in section 3.2 of Chapter 3. In summary, after considerable assessment by the researcher, grounded theory emerged to provide not only the most appropriate theoretical framework for addressing the research problem, but the optimal methodology for undertaking the research.

2.5.4 Grounded theory

Grounded theory emanates from the field of sociology and has been described as a balanced position or intermediary between positivism and pragmatic field research (Charmaz 2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote their ground-breaking book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, based upon their experiences in researching death and dying amongst seriously ill patients, to provide a counter approach to researchers who considered the subjective and constructivist notions inherent in qualitative research to be less credible than positivist quantitative approaches.

The initial concept of grounded theory led to a research approach that was centred on the process of detailed data gathering from in-depth interviews and/or interaction with the research population coupled with considerable self-reflection in respect to strategies of analysis. Grounded theory promotes the notion of developing theories from data (grounded) rather than testing theories against data that is to be collected. This combination of social constructs and an individual’s reflective sense led to the form of grounded theory that is more constructivist in nature (Charmaz 2006), although its still finds its fundamental beginnings in the initial form first articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Subsequently, Glaser (1978, 1992) developed his thinking along a far more objectivist path and went on to more rigorously outline the fundamentals of grounded theory research methodology (Glaser 1998).

Over time, grounded theory split into two main styles of approach. Glaser (1998) remained a devotee of emphasising empiricism completely reliant on data collection and analysis. In contrast, Strauss (1998) sought to refine the original methodology that promoted the premise
that wider verification of data, through other research techniques such as conducting a literature review, could add considerable value and robustness to the research approach and subsequent theory building (Corbin & Strauss 1990; Strauss & Corbin 1994, 1998).

As outlined in Chapter 1 and expanded in more detail in section 3.2 of Chapter 3, the concept of grounded theory is that original analysis is based around a data grounded system of iteration between data and the concepts it creates. Grounded theory involves collecting data with as little preconceived mental constructs as possible. The data can be collected in a variety of ways, for example, interviews, observation and/or active immersion. The data that is collected is coded in a fashion that facilitates continual reflection not only from its source but also with subsequent data collection.

The essential underlying structure to the data analytical process that this type of coding creates is that the data stays both inextricably linked to its source but progressively, through the technique of categorisation of the codes into concepts, is also abstracted away from its source. This abstraction progressively transforms raw material into abstract concepts from which the construction of theories can occur. As such, the theories are built from the data up – hence grounded theory. Being qualitative the researcher is clearly receiving the data through their own perspectives and social construct (Charmaz 2006).

This theoretical analysis approach has elements of positivism and constructivism (Glaser 1978). This is well articulated as follows: “one would hope by sticking to the data, the analyst is left out of the interpretative process, but this is highly unlikely” (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 123). Acknowledgement of the interaction between social constructs and an individual’s reflective sense of their place within that construct is critical to grounded theory (Charmaz 2006).
2.5.5 Grounded theory and the role of literature reviews

As first mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, for some grounded theorists the literature review is considered to be unhelpful and should be avoided altogether (Glaser 1998); or if undertaken, should be done after data collection to minimise the risk of a predilection to frame and bound the data and predetermine the resultant theory building. More recent authors such as Charmaz (2006), who was a student of Glaser and Strauss (1967), regard the literature review as a legitimate contributor to creating an informed researcher. Further, Charmaz (2006) maintains that disciplined adherence to the data collection practices and analytical techniques can overcome the potential limitations that undertaking a literature review might create for a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis.

This ongoing debate about the literature review is a feature of proponents of grounded theory. Indeed, the acknowledged founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), now hold different views about the appropriateness and place of conducting a review of literature. Glaser’s (1998) view is discussed above, while Strauss (1998) considers a literature review to be helpful in providing some contextual structure and assistance with both the refinement of a research problem and in selecting the appropriate research methodology for that problem.

The literature review for this study, with a theoretical framework discourse, served as a useful point of comparison and an analytical touchstone. The review was undertaken prior to the data being collected and analysed; the literature review was completed in January 2007 and data collection did not commence until October 2008. This approach provided research guidance and created a more informed researcher, while mitigating the degree of influence the literature review could have had during the data collection, data analysis and iterative theory building research phases. Research discipline and following the protocols suggested by Charmaz (2006) ensured theory building came from an informed researcher who held an ‘open mind’.
2.6 Conclusion

The literature review for this thesis was undertaken to inform the researcher on the existing body of knowledge about inter-institutional collaboration. It was also used as a source of information on theoretical frameworks and research methodologies that could be applied to this study. This inter-relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 Inter-relationship of literature review and theoretical framework

![Diagram showing the inter-relationship of literature review, theoretical framework, research problem, theoretical model, and data.]

Source: Developed for this research

2.6.1 Literature gaps

The literature is vast in its descriptions of success and failure in institutional collaboration. While the literature that was reviewed provided insights into many facets of collaborative activity, it did not seem to identify a generic theoretical framework or operational model that was widely referred to or accessed by practitioners in the field. The reviewed literature was also relatively sparse on the preparative stage of collaboration and how learnings from previous collaborative endeavours could potentially inform this stage. In addition, most previous experience-based studies, for example Daigle and Robinson (2000), Fenwick (2006) and Kyvik (2002), had focussed on collaboration in the form of mergers and amalgamations in the tertiary education sector, which usually leads to the loss of identity of one or all of the participating institutions. In contrast, the researcher was interested in investigating manifestations of collaboration where all of the participating parties retained their individual identity.
A striking feature of the reviewed literature for the researcher was the lack of research that had been sourced from the direct and extended personal experiences of leaders in tertiary education institutions to contrast or reinforce studies undertaken by academic commentators. In addition, there appeared to be a lack of any empirical approach in the New Zealand context; what did exist was lacking in a systematic framework that could allow replication in an informed and deliberate fashion.

The literature that was reviewed considered and raised many questions on the issue of inter-institutional collaborative activity that are worthy of further consideration. How do organisations ‘get good’ at collaborating, especially where there are emotionally charged issues of institutional or academic autonomy? Why is it so difficult to find a model or success factors that can be universally applied in each collaborative situation? One conclusion drawn from the literature review was that commitment to collaborative outcomes, in itself, does not signify an institution’s fitness for the journey ahead.

The following quotation represented some of the collective information gathered during the literature review about the potential downsides of collaboration: “At worst, collaboration can be a time consuming, resource intensive stereotype, self-satisfying substitute for any real action” (European Access News 2001). For some commentators, collaboration is not an ‘all-time good’. Another perspective comes from Johnston (1977) that in so many ways collaboration is: “an untidy business, full of uncharted territory, ambiguities, and institutional complexities” (Johnston 1977, p. 1). Further, Thomas and Woodrow (2002) remind us that there is a real danger of seeing collaboration as the outcome rather than a means to accomplish an outcome.

In contrast to this, is commentary that highlighted the outcomes that collaboration is striving to achieve. This includes Fenwick (2006) who states: “Collaborations open unique sites for organisational learning” (Fenwick 2006, p. 138) and the following quote from Hostetter (1988):

The Philly campus… has impacted Messiah far out of proportion to its size. It has diversified our curriculum, enriched our service opportunities, electrified our students, and introduced many additional cultural options to the college community (Hostetter 1988, p. 2).
This suggests that collaboration is a meaningful option for some institutions to achieve institutional goals and deliver wider benefits to learners and the broader sector, and is potentially worth the associated issues and challenges that seem to be inevitably linked to undertaking this type of institutional activity.

In summary, the gaps that were identified in the existing body of knowledge from the literature that was reviewed suggested that it was worthy to undertake an investigation into inter-institutional collaboration that encompassed activities where the participating institutions retained their institutional autonomy and that was based on the direct personal experiences of leaders in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. This research aims to address some of the identified knowledge gaps, with an emphasis on practical and managerial application rather than on policy development. It also seeks to provide a framework within which leaders can access learnings from their peers to consider ways to prepare their institutions for collaboration and ensure the intent of collaboration is aligned with its application.

2.6.2 **Theoretical frameworks and research methodology**

As outlined in earlier sections of this chapter, the literature review was also used to investigate and assess theoretical frameworks and research methodologies that could be used for this study. Following the emergence of the research subject area and research problems, the researcher considered that a constructivist (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998) paradigm would be the most appropriate for undertaking research into the views and direct experiences of tertiary institution leaders in inter-institutional collaboration. Within the selected constructivist approach, grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) was selected as the most apposite theoretical framework for this study. After further consideration, grounded theory was also identified as the most appropriate methodology for undertaking the research within the selected theoretical framework.
As indicated in section 2.5 of this chapter, some grounded theorists (Glaser 1998) suggest avoiding a literature review to minimise the potential influence the review can have on the researcher entering research with as objective approach as possible. Others consider that a literature review can be beneficial to ensuring the researcher is informed on the research subject and can be conducted in a way that minimises the impact on the researcher’s objectivity (Charmaz 2006; Strauss & Corbin 1998). This literature review was undertaken in line with this latter approach. Adherence to a grounded theory approach to literature reviews was also assisted by the period of elapsed time between these two phases.

The literature review for this research proved to be a useful starting point for the researcher to think theoretically rather than merely descriptively. Concurrently, it stimulated how the researcher developed some initial sets of ideas, concepts and comparisons between existing approaches to the broad research area under consideration. The adoption of a grounded theoretical framework aimed to facilitate the extension of this to address the existing body of knowledge.

The research methodology adopted for this study is examined in the next chapter and the findings are detailed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and research methodology that was selected for this research. It also outlines the process for selecting the data collection and analytical techniques that were applied. Details about the steps taken to enhance the validity and reliability of the research undertaken are provided in this chapter along with a discussion about how these elements relate to the selected approach of grounded theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion about ethical considerations.

The chapter is comprised of three sections.

1. Research methodology selection and justification – the process that was undertaken to select a theoretical framework most suitable for the research problem is outlined in this section. The section also provides a description of some of the issues associated with the chosen methodology that underpinned the research.

2. Research methodology and procedures – this section examines the instrument used to collect the data, the framework undertaken for the chosen data collection process of interviews, and matters associated with sample size and selection, data collection and data saturation. The data analysis and theory building processes, research limitations and issues associated with validity, reliability and data integrity are also outlined in this part of the chapter.

3. Ethical issues – ethical issues relating to the research including researcher bias, informed consent of participants, and risk to participants are discussed in this section.
3.2 Research methodology selection and justification

3.2.1 Background

Central to the process of selecting a research methodology for this study was identifying a theoretical framework and methodology that would best address the research problem and derive findings that could provide some practical application.

The previous chapter outlined the literature review that was undertaken for this research. This review assisted in clarifying the research problem and the most suitable theoretical framework and research methodology to apply to this study. For example, the review contributed to refining the scope of the research area from institutional collaboration in the education sector in general, to institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector. The final research problem was defined as the following:

1. What is the experience of institutional leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?

The source of data for this research was institutional leaders within the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The research process aimed to collect contributions based on the personal experiences and insights of these leaders that could then be analysed to derive learnings that could be practically applied within the sector.
3.2.2 Selection and justification of chosen research methodology

This section examines the process the researcher used to select the most appropriate research methodology for this study.

The researcher started by contemplating the relative merits of various theoretical paradigms within which to place this study. This process has been described as ‘theoretical playfulness’ (Charmaz 2006), a concept that is articulated differently by Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) who describe it as ‘theoretical agnosticism’. The frameworks that were considered included positivist, constructivist and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Positivism (and post-positivism) is concerned with discovering objective truth, is hypothesis oriented and is usually associated with quantitative research. In contrast, constructivism is more concerned with the context within which the research is being undertaken. Its findings are invariably subjective and it resonates more in qualitative research. Rather than simply acknowledging its findings are subjective, critical theory claims it derives academic rigour from accepting its findings have been shaped by the values and norms of the researcher. A common methodology for critical theory is action research.

An analysis of these theoretical paradigms is outlined in Table 3.1 below sourced from Guba and Lincoln (1994).
Table 3.1 Paradigm positions on selected practical issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Post-positivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory et al.</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry aim</td>
<td>Explanation: prediction and control</td>
<td>Critique and transformation; restitution and</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature of knowledge</td>
<td>Verified hypotheses established as facts or law</td>
<td>Non-falsified hypotheses that are probable</td>
<td>Structural/historical insights</td>
<td>Individual reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>facts or laws</td>
<td></td>
<td>coalescing around consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge accumulation</td>
<td>Accretion—“building clocks” adding to</td>
<td>Historical revisionism; generalisation by</td>
<td>More informed and sophisticated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“edifice of knowledge”; generalisations and</td>
<td>similarity</td>
<td>reconstructed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cause-effect linkages</td>
<td></td>
<td>reconstruction;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness or quality criteria</td>
<td>Conventional benchmarks of “rigor”; internal</td>
<td>Historical situatedness, erosion of</td>
<td>Trustworthiness and authenticity and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and external validity, reliability, and</td>
<td>ignorance</td>
<td>misapprehensions;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>objectivity</td>
<td>Action stimulus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Excluded-influence denied</td>
<td>Included-formative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>extrinsic; tilt towards deception</td>
<td>Intrinsic; moral tilt towards revelation</td>
<td>Intrinsic; process tilt toward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>revelation; special problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>“Disinterested scientist” as informer of</td>
<td>“transformative intellectual” as advocate and</td>
<td>“passionate participant” as facilitator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decision makers, policy makers, and change</td>
<td>activist</td>
<td>of multi-voice reconstruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>agents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Technical and quantitative; substantive theories</td>
<td>Technical; quantitative and qualitative;</td>
<td>Resocialisation; qualitative and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>substantive theories</td>
<td>quantitative; history; values of altruism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Commensurable</td>
<td>Incommensurable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegemony</td>
<td>In control of publication, funding, promotion,</td>
<td>Seeking recognition and input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Guba & Lincoln (1994) p.112

Building on the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) the researcher developed a explanatory table that contrasted the paradigms mentioned above, with the addition of grounded theory, against the elements of ontology, epistemology and common methodology. This can be seen in Table 3.2 below.
Table 3.2 Characteristics of research paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Naïve realism</td>
<td>Relative to constructs and context</td>
<td>Reality shaped by values and time</td>
<td>Reality shaped by experiences regardless of time and context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Objective truth</td>
<td>Subjective findings</td>
<td>Value constraints</td>
<td>“What’s gong on”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Experimental Hypothesis</td>
<td>Iterative Dialogue</td>
<td>Intellectual Dialogue Action research</td>
<td>Iterative Dialogue Memoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common methodology</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for</td>
<td>Proof</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Restitution</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994)

In simple terms, grounded theory has its ontological reality shaped by experiences. Epistemologically, grounded theory is centred on ‘what is going on’ and has a specific research methodology that sees data collected, coded and grouped into concepts and categories from which theory is built (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Grounded theory best fits within a constructivism paradigm due to its alignment with the nature of knowledge sought, the accumulation of knowledge, and the strength of the data quality. Further, grounded theory enhances the generalisability of the research findings through its building of themes and categories from that strength of data quality.

The relevant literature provided a wide range of possible theoretical directions. These included symbolic interactionalism (Blumer 1969; Neumann 2006), nationalistic inquiry (Erlandson et al. 1993), gaming theory (Goffman 1959), along with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).
Symbolic interactionalism is based on a view that people interact with each other through a self-imposed filter rather than through a simple process of action and counteraction. Nationalistic inquiry is based on an assumption that any event is orderly in nature and that understanding about any event can be gleaned through the application of a disciplined, scientific method. In contrast, gaming theory is based on describing relationships in terms of games between players.

Apart from grounded theory, the other frameworks that were considered were to a greater or lesser extent associated with forming a hypothesis and testing it through research. Whether or not to test a hypothesis or allow a theory to evolve was a key decision for much of the early stages of the study. Finally, it was considered that an approach that involved testing a hypothesis may not sufficiently acknowledge the context within which tertiary sector leaders acted. In addition, it could place too much emphasis on overly vague descriptors and struggle to uncover the underlying themes of what was really going on in the minds and actions of tertiary education institution leaders in undertaking inter-institutional collaboration.

After the literature review was completed, it seemed more innovative to build from data that was based on the experiences of tertiary institution leaders rather than use this data to confirm or contrast a preset hypothesis. To uncover rich insights from the research participants, the framework needed to be qualitatively orientated and based on conversations rather than a simply a rote question and answer interaction. This led to the adoption of a theoretical framework that was constructivist in nature and a methodology that could combine inductive and deductive reasoning. The abductive mechanism contained within grounded theory facilitates a constant iteration between data, analysis and theory generation and as such, helps to address the research criteria within qualitative research of fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967).

On balance, a constructivist paradigm was deemed the most appropriate framework to overarch the qualitative research approach. This was due to its focus on placing activity within a social setting and facilitating both explanatory and exploratory data collection. In addition, the researcher is attempting to secure the participants’ perspectives on their experiences and not on ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ information. Constructivism as a research approach also acknowledges that the data obtained is filtered by the researcher’s own values
and experiences (Cresswell 2003). On a more practical methodology basis, constructivism again seemed apt, in comparison to the other approaches described above and illustrated in Table 3.1, sourced from Guba and Lincoln (1994).

Having selected a theoretical paradigm, the researcher then considered methodologies to apply within this paradigm. Table 3.3 outlines the different research methodologies that were considered as part of this process. The table is from Parisi (2009), who developed it from Neumann (2006) and McMurray (2005).
Table 3.3 Different research approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To support or disprove a hypothesis and provide rigorous evidence that is</td>
<td>Understand a social setting and what it means for the people within.</td>
<td>To provide evidence or information that will empower those less fortunate or victims of discrimination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>valid, reliable and objective and can be replicated.</td>
<td>Can be: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to “theory test”</td>
<td>Likely to “theory build”</td>
<td>Likely to contribute to “theory development”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Traditional/experimental. Begins with a hypothesis collates statistical data to support/disprove and come to definitive conclusions. Valid, reliable and objective. Value free.</td>
<td>Takes into consideration history and anthropology of social situations. Gets very close to the situation and explores it in depth. Interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed about their social situation. Credible, transferable and dependable. Value grounded</td>
<td>Search for explanations so that we can correct the social reality. First person research opposes objectivity, reveals “multiple perspectives”. Credible, transferable and dependable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigms underpinning the approach</td>
<td>Positivist.</td>
<td>Interpretivist/constructivist.</td>
<td>Critical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methods used to support the approach</td>
<td>Deductive Surveys Questionnaires</td>
<td>Ethnography Case-studies Action research Grounded theory.</td>
<td>Critical ethnography Critical case studies Critical action research Reflective journal keeping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The researcher examined the relative merits of quantitative or qualitative research methodologies that would be optimal for the chosen research problem. A key element of the research being undertaken focuses on the behaviours and attitudes of key individuals within each institution who hold responsibility for the leadership of their respective institution’s involvement in collaboration. Given this, the major consideration in the selection process was
assessing and identifying which methodology would be most efficacious in securing access to and engaging with tertiary education institution leaders.

For the research to provide substance and context, the information needed to be managed into an analytical framework that would reflect and capture experiences, views and subjective opinions rather than facts, figures and hard data. In his writings, Yin (1989) describes qualitative methodology as appropriate in research where data relates to subjective constructs being articulated rather than facts and proofs being tested. This aligns with perceptions of reality driven by social constructs borne out of social interaction and the importance of context over verifiable hypotheses proven by facts.

Taking a quantitative or a critical theory approach was considered. However, a quantitative approach with its prime attention on theory testing, and critical theory, with its ‘call for action to redress wrongs’, were both regarded as sub-optimal in gaining access to tertiary sector leaders and collecting data in the form of rich and utilitarian primary source material. Table 3.3 above, developed from Neumann (2006), McMurray (2005) and sourced from Parisi (2009), provides an illustration of the suitability of a qualitative approach compared with a quantitative approach or utilising critical theory for this research.

There is significant commentary in management publications that endorse the use of qualitative research approaches to study inter-organisational management activity, for example, how institutions identify, negotiate, commit and evaluate joint ventures (Torre & Arino 1998). Some thought was given to taking a qualitative approach by applying a case study framework (Yin 2003). However, case study has greater application where the research is considering an in-depth examination of a particular initiative. In contrast, this research study was concerned with gleaning information from a number of institutional leaders within the tertiary education sector to gain insights and information that could be potentially be applied to the sector as a whole.

A case study approach could also have a risk of constraining the ability of participants through dialogue to reveal their full sense of knowledge and insight. This is because case studies generally take a set approach to collecting data about an organisation’s experiences. This can result in collecting data that is ‘fit for purpose’ for the study as opposed to allowing
participants to contribute their knowledge and experiences in as open-ended and unstrained fashion as possible. The researcher sought to use an approach that would allow theory to emerge unconstrained from the data that was collected.

In summary, a qualitative research approach utilising grounded theory was selected for the chosen field of study for the following reasons:

1. It was considered that this approach would best meet the research objective of identifying attributes for successful collaborative activity by collecting insights from tertiary institution leaders in comparison to alternative approaches such as testing a hypothesis.
2. The nature of the data collected was unlikely to provide distinct variables that could in some way be quantitatively measured.
3. This approach would allow a data collection method that would be iterative as opposed to having a methodology fixed before data collection occurred.
4. Data would be in the form of words rather than numbers, and the associated analysis would not be in the form of tabulations, spreadsheets and statistical analysis. Instead, it would take the form of examining themes, patterns and general findings in an attempt to identify overarching concepts that could be developed into theory for potential practical application to the wider tertiary education sector. Put in simple terms, the data would ‘paint a picture’ and/or ‘tell a story’.
5. Theory would be derived from an abductive approach where insight comes from the collected evidence, rather than from a deductive approach where a hypothesis is postulated prior to data collection and then tested.
6. The research procedures that were undertaken could be replicated in further studies.

This chapter now provides more detail about grounded theory which formed the theoretical backbone and research methodological process on which this study was built.
3.2.3 Grounded theory

Grounded theory was selected for this study as it was considered to be the most apposite theoretical framework and research methodology to address the research problem of how the learnings from tertiary education institution leaders could be applied to the wider sector to enhance the overall effectiveness of inter-institutional collaborative activity.

Grounded theory has been described as a “systematic, qualitative research methodology in the social sciences emphasising generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research” (Martin & Turner 1986, p. 141). In a reverse fashion to more traditional approaches, grounded theory has as its first major phase the analysis of data through a disciplined process of coding and grouping concepts to form analytical categories which in turn provide a foundation to build theories. This is in contrast to a more traditional approach where a researcher selects a framework, postulates a theory and tests this theory against the data collected (Allan 2003).

The primary objective of grounded theory is to create theory that can be traced back to the primary or raw data that was collected. As such, theories are built or ‘ground’ from the data up – hence, grounded theory. The data, through the analytical discipline described briefly above, creates progressively more abstract concepts that remain intrinsically linked to their source. Proponents of the theory consider this linkage, which has been formed both inductively and deductively, as an effective tool to uncover the main issues and their reflections on those issues. As outlined earlier in the chapter, this is often described by grounded theorists as uncovering ‘what is going on’ in a situation (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Grounded theory is not focused on ‘finding the truth’ or the correct description of events. Instead, it is trying to explain how people have acted, reflected on that action and could perhaps act differently in the future when faced with similar situations. The goal of this research was to use the reflections of tertiary education institution leaders on past incidents and experiences of collaboration to create a theory to aid in improving management of future collaborative ventures. Given this, grounded theory was considered to be the most appropriate methodology to achieve this.
Because it is not factual, findings obtained through grounded theory cannot be tested for validity in the traditional sense, however research robustness can still be assessed through the tests of fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967). Fit is used to describe how well the theoretical concepts match the data from which they have been built. Relevance relates to the utility for practical application, rather than mere academic interest. Workability of a theory relates to whether it can be applied more widely than the precise research area that has been studied. Modifiability is the extent to which the theory formed from the original data is enhanced, as opposed to contradicted, by new or additional data.

As outlined in Chapter 2, grounded theory was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which was based on their studies of death and dying amongst terminally ill hospitalised patients. Since then the theory, which is essentially a constant comparative method of research, has evolved with the original proponents splitting in their views on the application of the research method. This diversion in views is particularly in the area of how disciplined the coding process is during data analysis (Kelle 2005), and the extent to which the research should be undertaken free from any preparation prior to data collection, for example, undertaking a literature review.

As with any research methodology there are different approaches and differences of opinion on the applicability of those approaches. In relation to grounded theory, for example, there is the debate between proponents of constructivist grounded theory and objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2000, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the mental constructs that a researcher brings to any research study. In comparison, researchers undertaking objectivist grounded theory endeavour to remain as distant or ‘aloof’ from the research material as possible. Given the nature of this research, which focuses on the details and dynamics of tertiary education institutional collaboration, together with the researcher’s professional association with the tertiary education sector, it seemed inappropriate to suggest the researcher could remain completely detached from both the data and the participants from which that data was obtained.
During this research, the researcher was not ‘at a distance’ from the research methodology. Rather it is acknowledged that the researcher would have filtered to a greater or lesser extent the information that the participants contributed. It is also important to acknowledge that the participants also provided their information through a construct created by their own unique journey of work experience that they were describing, which in turn populates the data that was collected.

The application of grounded theory is controversial (Charmaz 2006). As outlined above and in previous chapters, there has been a major split in the application of the methodology among proponents of the theory. Given this controversy and the greater reliance on methods of data collection to develop a theory rather than a theoretical framework against which data is contrasted and tested, there is a larger requirement for the research methodology to be thoroughly understood and appropriately applied (Phillips & Pugh 1987). In addition, details of the methodology of data collection need to be described in much greater detail (Yin 1989). Details about the data collection approach, methodology, process and procedures are provided in the next section of this chapter.

As in any research approach there are critics of this theory. In terms of grounded theory, critics dismiss its core nature as having scant theoretical structure and, at times, is equally advocated and criticised for having little to do with qualitative research methods or qualitative data analysis (Glaser 1992). These criticisms are mainly centred around whether the reverse research method actually provides theory as opposed to a mere description of events or, put another way, how can one ascertain how grounded one’s findings really are? In addition, critics also highlight the extent to which it is possible to undertake any research without any predetermined views or mental constructs (Thomas & James 2006).

The researcher acknowledges these views. Nevertheless, the benefits of using a research methodology which maximised the degree and depth of rich data that could be obtained through a grounded theory approach coupled with the disciplined application of the data analytical techniques promulgated by grounded theory more than compensated for the potential drawbacks alluded to in the above criticisms. The data collected from the interviews with tertiary institution leaders delivered on this ‘promise’. The importance of securing theoretical insight depends on following a robust data collection and analytical
process. This process is central to the success of a grounded theory approach. The next section provides details on the data collection and analysis processes that were undertaken for this study.

### 3.3 Research methodology and procedures

#### 3.3.1 Instrument to collect data

3.3.1.1 Background and instrument selection

Having selected grounded theory as the theoretical framework and research methodology to undertake this study, the researcher then turned to identifying the best instrument or tool for the data collection process. As outlined earlier, the focus for this study was on collecting insights from tertiary education institution leaders about how best to undertake meaningful collaborative activity. Utilising a grounded theory approach, the researcher considered dynamic conversations with tertiary leaders as the most effective way of collecting data that would provide rich and constructive insights that could be used to build both theory and guidelines for practical application in the tertiary education sector.

The grounded theory research process undertaken in this study is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below and is adapted from Charmaz (2006). This iterative oriented process presented some timeframe issues as the research study was not based on observing collaborative activity in motion; rather it was centred on reflections on what had happened (‘what was going on’). The challenge was to select a data collection mechanism that optimised the possibility of the participant looking back with the benefit of hindsight and with a potentially more objective view on how events occurred. This required a data collection tool that was aligned to a non-linear interpretive path (Neumann 2006) and would allow iterative dialogue between the researcher and the research participants so that subsequent answers to earlier questions could be revisited.
Further, the data gathering mechanism for this study had to be broad enough to capture the widest possible potential contributions to advancing the existing body of knowledge and to ensure participants did not limit or self-regulate what they considered to be relevant input. It also needed to be specific enough to identify particular patterns and precedents that could be
widely adopted. This suggested a data collection technique that was not based on testing a hypothesis or looking for statistical reliability; rather a technique that was more concerned with theoretical sampling to develop trends, themes, patterns and concepts. As a result of this approach to data collection, the researcher aimed to derive both theoretical knowledge and ‘fit for purpose’ best practice guidelines to improve how tertiary institutions undertake collaboration.

Grounded theory utilises a number of methods for data collection. These include ethnographic, interviewing, action research, focus groups, and the analysis of text (Charmaz 2006). Ethnographic involves the researcher becoming embedded in the life of the research group under study and effectively requires both observation and interactive participation. Textual analysis within grounded theory requires the content and context of source material being studied. This involves identifying environmental factors that influenced the content of the material and incorporating the assessment of those environmental factors into the data analysis process. Action research has as its underlying tenant the incorporation of research participants as researchers themselves in the data collection and analysis stages (MacIssac 1996). It also involves the researcher becoming integrally involved in the participants’ world with a resulting compromised level of objectivity (Winter 1989). Focus groups involve gathering groups of people in an interactive setting and asking them to respond to questions about their perceptions and opinions (Lindlof & Taylor 2002). Interviewing within grounded theory involves not only a directive conversation, it is an “in-depth investigation of a particular topic with a person who has had relevant experiences” (Charmaz 2006, p. 25). Charmaz (2006) further describes this particular approach in the following terms: “Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches” (Charmaz 2006, p. 28).

The researcher selected data collection via semi-structured open-ended interview as the most appropriate approach for this study. An ethnographic approach was considered to be impractical given the researcher’s familiarity with the tertiary education sector. Because of this the researcher could not realistically undertake the role of a neutral observer. In addition, an ethnographic approach could have led to data overload with a plethora of observations. This could have created a situation where the data would have provided a
detailed narrative of events but little theoretical insight (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). Action research was considered to be unduly problematic due to logistical issues such as the researcher being embedded into a series of New Zealand tertiary institutions as well as issues associated with organisational sensitivity and maintaining anonymity.

The use of focus groups is compatible with the technique of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), however the logistical challenge of convening a series of meetings with groups of tertiary education institutional leaders was deemed to be impractical. Further, there are well known limitations to the use of the focus groups, such as ‘group think’ and possible alignment of responses to please the researcher’s presence (Nachmais & Nachmais 2008).

In comparison to open-ended interviewing, textual analysis was considered as being less effective in uncovering new knowledge from personal leadership experiences (Charmaz 2006). A research study that was built around textual analysis could have provided relatively limited insights into what ‘actually’ happened and participants’ reflective thoughts in hindsight.

In summary, interviewing using a semi-structured open interview process was considered the most appropriate and effective way of applying a grounded theory approach in addressing the research problem. Intensive interviewing following grounded theory principles was also deemed to provide greater management of data collection and construction in comparison to analysis of primary written documentation, secondary sources, or via embedded observations utilising an ethnographic approach.

The use of structured interviews as an appropriate data collection methodology in undertaking qualitative research into collaboration is promoted by Short and Stein (2001). This approach reinforces the emphasis of data collection towards revealing the underlying dynamics such as barriers, influencers and enablers rather than the details of times, events and project milestones. Further, this view is supported by Merriam (1986) who considers semi-structured open interviews to be a robust technique for collecting data that captures interpretations and possible inferences of the participants’ underlying norms, beliefs and values as long as these interpretation and inferences are transparent and the researcher acknowledges their own filters within which the information was recorded.
Table 3.4 illustrates the sources of evidence that the researcher considered as part of the research design preparation and Table 3.5 outlines the process used to select the appropriate data collection methods.

Table 3.4 Sources of evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of evidence</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>• Stable</td>
<td>• Easily retrieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unobtrusive</td>
<td>• Selective bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exact</td>
<td>• Reporting bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Broad</td>
<td>• Access blocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Precise</td>
<td>• Reporting bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Easily retrieved</td>
<td>• Access blocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selective bias</td>
<td>• Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor recording</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflexivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival</td>
<td>• Stable</td>
<td>• Reporting bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unobtrusive</td>
<td>• Access blocked</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exact</td>
<td>• Cost</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Precise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Targeted</td>
<td>• Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Insightful on detail and dynamic inferences</td>
<td>• Poor questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct observance</td>
<td>• Reality captured within context</td>
<td>• Selectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant observance</td>
<td>• Reality captured within context</td>
<td>• Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inter-personal context captured</td>
<td>• Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Investigators bias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical artefact</td>
<td>• Cultural insight</td>
<td>• Selectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technical process</td>
<td>• Availability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adopted from Yin (2003) p. 86
### Table 3.5 Selecting the appropriate data collection method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Contemporary focus</th>
<th>Control over behaviour required</th>
<th>Type of research problem</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Yin (2003)

#### 3.3.1.2 Interview framework and questions

To complement the interviewing framework espoused by grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), the researcher drew on Patton (2002) as providing the central basis to develop the interview structure. Alternative perspectives on how best to collect data within a semi-structured open interview process were considered, primarily case study (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003).

Following this process, the broad framework for the interviews was based on the following elements sourced from Patton (2002):

1. Behaviour/experience;
2. Opinion/value;
3. Feeling;
4. Knowledge;
5. Sensory;
6. Demographics and background.
The researcher considered the most optimal form of interview structure was one that was purposefully planned and organised to ensure a consistent approach across each and every interview. This would assist in ensuring some common information was collected and aid in facilitating comparative analysis across all data. The semi-formal structure of the interviews was also adopted to assist in gaining the participation of the research participants who were all relatively important and busy people. The semi-formal nature of the interview questions conveyed that the research was being undertaken in a professional and meaningful way.

The interviews were designed to be in depth (Lofland & Lofland 1995) to allow the interviewer to build rapport with the interviewee and enable deep and iterative dialogue to gain the rich insights the researcher was seeking. As a result, the contributions from the interview participants would be substantive (Seidman 1998). The interview structure and approach also recognised that due to the nature of their roles and considerable sector experience, participants would want to provide their contributions in a relatively free and open format that was not constrained by requiring them to provide a view on a hypothesis provided by the researcher. Put another way, the interview participants would want to ‘tell their story’ their way and not be restricted to a ‘script’.

The next stage was the development of the interview questionnaire. There were a number of factors that influenced the design, content and length of the questionnaire. First, the interview questionnaire needed to meet the ethical requirements of Southern Cross University’s doctoral programme relating to data collection for research initiatives where there is minimal risk to participants. Second, the questionnaire provided a tool to secure the interest and participation of the research participants. As outlined above, to do this the questionnaire needed to convey a sense of professionalism and formality for the research process; it also needed to highlight the topicality of the research to the tertiary education sector and the extent to which participants could both contribute and benefit from being involved in it. Third, the questionnaire needed to balance providing some guide to the scope and nature of topic while not unduly inhibiting the broadest possible contribution from participants.

The actual wording of the questions was an iterative process. This process was influenced by the qualitative research methodology paper undertaken at the pre-thesis stage of the doctoral programme, and accessing a range of authors on the topic of interview structures within the
area of qualitative research including: Patton (2002), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Charmaz (2006), Ely (1991) and Berg (2004). In particular, the questions were configured to align with the suggested approach for best practice grounded theory interviewing espoused by Charmaz (2006) and illustrated in Table 3.6 below.

Table 3.6  Interview questions that reflect grounded theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charmaz</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me…</td>
<td>What is the role of the protagonist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What works…</td>
<td>What are the enables and disenables?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was it like…</td>
<td>How do your institutes behave during collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe…</td>
<td>What are the successful attributes of collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What contributed…</td>
<td>How can best practice be articulated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you…</td>
<td>What does collaborative leadership look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do it…</td>
<td>Why do you collaborate?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Charmaz (2006) p.30-31

The final wording of the questions was the result of dialogue with the researcher’s doctoral supervisor and also influenced by the researcher’s involvement at various doctoral symposiums organised by Southern Cross University. The format and wording of the questions was finalised following a pilot interview that was undertaken prior to the commencement of the formal data collection process. The pilot interview reassured the researcher that the planned questions were not only appropriate but could also perform the function of opening up wider dialogue. A copy of the interview questionnaire and associated documentation, for example the cover letter to interview participants, interview guide and consent form, is included in Appendix 3.1.
3.3.2 Data sample size and selection

3.3.2.1 Sample size and selection

As noted by Davis and Cosenza (1993), when collecting data from a subset of the total population it is important to disclose details about the sample size and selection process. There were a number of factors that influenced the data sample size for this study. These included the underlying research methodology utilised for the research (grounded theory), the data collection method being used (semi-structured open face-to-face interviews), and the relatively limited size of the sample population.

Grounded theory advocates that data sample size is not a function of population representation. Instead, data saturation is achieved by the intensity of interaction with the participants and obtaining sufficient data for the construction of theory. Grounded theorists (Charmaz 2006) assert that concentrating on interviewing in-depth can provide a ‘window’ into seeing a complete picture of the area of interest. Further, Short and Stein (2001) suggest that the researcher should use a conscious respondent selection based on the participants’ involvement and roles in collaboration. This selection technique involves specifically selecting participants based on certain criteria, which in this case was tertiary education institutional leadership, rather than doing a random sample.

In this research, sampling was based on identifying key participants that might optimise the process of addressing the research problem. It was not based on attempting to encompass population distributions or the likelihood of collecting positive or negative responses to set questions (Berg 2004; Charmaz 2006; Ely 1991; Patton 2002). Rather, it was attempting to uncover ‘what is going on’ in tertiary institutions collaborative endeavours.

The data sample set was comprised of 3 vice-chancellors of New Zealand universities and 14 chief executives of New Zealand polytechnics and institutes of technology from a total sample population of 28. After considering literature about qualitative research methods (Charmaz 2006; Merriam 1986; Patton 2002), discussions with the researcher’s supervisor, and as a result of attending symposiums at Southern Cross University, the researcher
concluded that for the purposes of this research a sample size of between 8 and 12 was appropriate and sufficient to ensure ample richness and depth of data.

To achieve the selected sample size, the researcher planned to approach the total sample population to outline the proposed research and seek their participation in the study. The researcher prepared an introductory letter and supporting documents, which was sent by the researcher’s supervisor to the total population. Potential participants were asked to respond directly to the researcher’s supervisor so the researcher would be unaware of who had agreed, and not agreed, to be involved. From this, the supervisor intended to select the specified research pool of 8 to 12 participants, ensuring there was proportional representation of participants from universities and polytechnics and institutes of technology. Following the introductory letter being sent, 17 potential participants agreed to be involved in the research, with an additional person indicating they were willing to be involved but were unavailable due to travel commitments associated with their role.

The original plan of the researcher’s supervisor doing a ‘blind’ selection of 8 to 12 interviewees from the pool of willing participants was impacted by the small size of the sample and the researcher’s familiarity with many of the possible participants. Following discussion with the researcher’s supervisor, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to interview the total sample of willing participants for the study. This approach increased the degree of representation within the total sample population and across institution types. This consequently enlarged the degree to which a generalisable theory for the overall tertiary education sector could be developed.

There is a risk of relying on small data sets (Dey 1999), however 60 percent of the total sample population were interviewed and considerable amount of data was collected. The data collected was enhanced by the formality of the data collection process.
3.3.2.2 Data saturation

Data saturation for grounded theory occurs when no new theoretical insights emerge from the data, rather than when no new data is forthcoming during the data collection process (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1998). In addition, data saturation in grounded theory is less based on ensuring a sufficient sample size for research validity; robustness primarily comes from theoretical saturation during data analysis rather than from the point where data becomes repetitive and has little additional utility. The data analysis slowed not when data saturation was reached but when analytical categories were saturated. This occurs when iterating with the data no longer suggests gaps, alteration and insights for possible new theoretical concepts. Some commentators, such as Goldthorpe (2000) do not accept that interview saturation is an adequate defence against having a representative sample.

Data saturation in traditional terms (Patton 2002) began to occur sometime between the eighth and tenth interviews. The data collection phase could have concluded at this stage as data saturation had been reached and there was potentially marginal utility to be gained from each successive interview. However, given the discipline of grounded theory and researcher’s desire to gain as much input from leaders within the tertiary education sector as possible, the data collection process continued. This benefited both the scale of contribution and the amount of source material for analysis leading to theory building.

The nature and seniority of the interview participants also played a part in preventing ‘information saturation’ that could have led to ‘matter of fact’ interviewing by the researcher (Charmaz 2006). As the dialogue flowed during each interaction, the iterative approach of the semi-structured interview process facilitated a deeper and more rounded understanding of the research problem for the researcher. Different perspectives on similar experiences created opportunities for new insights and invariably provided an initial building block for subsequent theoretical concepts.
3.3.3 Data collection process

Table 3.7 provides a summary of the quality assessment strategies used during data collection and aspects of the data analysis phase. An overarching description of the interview design and administration process is provided in Figure 3.2.

Table 3.7 Quality assessment strategies used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Assessment strategies</th>
<th>Phase of research including techniques used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>• Pretesting interview approach.</td>
<td>• Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consistent structure to interview.</td>
<td>• Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consistent interviewer (The Researcher).</td>
<td>• Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>• Utilisation of recognised approach.</td>
<td>• Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Semi-structured open interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalisability</td>
<td>• Recognition of limitation due to sample size potential interviewer bias.</td>
<td>• Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>• Compare research implications against existing literature.</td>
<td>• Post data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possibility of practical replication.</td>
<td>• Personal design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>• Interviewees reviewing results.</td>
<td>• Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pattern matching.</td>
<td>• Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explanation building.</td>
<td>• Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address rival explanations.</td>
<td>• Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>• Developing interview guidelines.</td>
<td>• Research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ease of independent review of data collection trial.</td>
<td>• Research design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Yin (2003) p.34
Figure 3.2 Interview design and administration process

**Stage One**

**Step 1**
Determine the information required

**Step 2**
Determine the interview method

**Step 3**
Identify the potential participants

**Stage Two**

**Step 4**
Develop interview format
Confirm wording and structure
Consider and decide any required sequency

**Step 5**
Test, review and finalise interview structure
Conduct pilot interview

**Stage Three**

**Step 6**
Confirm participant availability and consent

**Step 7**
Undertake interviews

**Stage Four**

**Step 8**
Transcribe data and verify with participants

**Step 9**
Contemplate issues of reliability, validity and generalisation

**Stage Five**

**Step 10**
Proceed to data analysis

Source: Developed for this research
3.3.3.1 Introduction

As outlined above, the data collection process was based on interviewing 17 vice-chancellors and chief executives of New Zealand tertiary education institutions. This was considered to be the most appropriate approach in obtaining rich insights into best practice in institutions preparing for collaborative ventures.

3.3.3.2 Formation of questions

This sub-section outlines the process that was undertaken to develop the questionnaire that was used during the data collection stage.

Grounded theory is considered to work best with broad open ended questions that facilitate rich and unconstrained contributions from interview participants (Charmaz 2006). Initially interviewees were given a set of 14 questions to reflect upon before the interviews occurred. These questions were designed to capture input on particular aspects of tertiary institutional collaboration to contribute to the research problem. As outlined earlier in this chapter, they were also designed to encourage interest and participation in the study by conveying a sense of professionalism and formality to the research.

The questionnaire design recognised that the participants would need sufficient structure and facilitation to focus their mind on the subject material and to engage them to reflect upon their experiences of institutional collaboration. In addition, the questionnaire was planned to maximise the degree of participant ease and the amount and depth of the participants’ perspectives on the research area. The nature of the questions coupled with how the questions were asked provided sufficient delineation of the research problem without unduly restricting insights that may have been ‘glossed over’ or missed altogether if a ‘stick to the question list’ methodology had been rigorously applied.
The questionnaire largely focused on four elements: how institutions behave as they contemplate collaboration; the role of key individuals within that contemplative phase; enablers and barriers to the success of collaboration; and attributes of successful collaboration.

The nature of the questions and their utility in gaining rich insights into the research problem was confirmed by a pilot interview. More details about this pilot interview are outlined in the next section.

3.3.3.3 Pilot interview

Before the interviews took place, a pilot interview was conducted on 2 October 2008 with a doctoral qualified former chief executive of a New Zealand polytechnic. This interview confirmed the appropriateness of the research approach to collect data. Discussions with the pilot interviewee also confirmed that the general approach and tone of the request for an interview would be likely to secure the attention of the proposed participants.

During the pilot interview the researcher experienced a cathartic realisation about how rich and deep the data would be if the planned methodology was applied. This approach sought to tap into the vein of knowledge and experience that the target participants would undoubtedly hold and via a methodology that had minimal constraints to the manner in which questions were asked and answered. This was glibly referred to during the interview as the ‘mother load’.

Further, the pilot interview contributed a ‘touchstone’ quotation which gave the researcher considerable confidence that the research would contribute to the body of knowledge that would be applicable to the tertiary education sector.
If only I had thought about how to (collaborate) before I rushed headlong into collaboration. I wonder if the individualism of academia is a barrier personified in an academic institution’s ability to think about how best to collaborate and perhaps the resonance of this individualism permeates all institutions that take on implementing collaboration. Collaboration is more than simply co-ordinating like-minded activities; collaboration has possibly become no more than a compliance cost to satisfy the centre (Rutland 2008).

The pilot interview indicated that an interview length of 45-60 minutes was sufficient to complete the interview in a comprehensive manner. It also suggested that the interview would ‘ebb and flow’ and in all likelihood a single question would initiate an extensive flow of dialogue. The pilot interview helped refine the style, tone and delivery of the intended semi-structured open interview question approach.

3.3.3.4 Logistics of interviews

A formal letter of introduction was sent to the population sample of 28 university vice-chancellors and polytechnic and institute of technology chief executives in September 2008. This letter was signed and distributed by the researcher’s doctoral supervisor. A sample copy of this letter and supporting documentation can be found in Appendix 3.1.

The introductory letter outlined that a doctoral student was conducting research into the manner in which New Zealand education tertiary institutions undertake collaborative activity with the aim of identifying and promulgating a best practice managerial toolkit. The participants were invited to participate by being interviewed at their convenience and were informed that the interviews would be conducted by the researcher and would be digitally recorded. Further, the resultant data would be transcribed and would be available for validation by the participant. The participants were also offered the opportunity to receive a summary report of the research findings. Other details about the interview were included in the letter such as the approximate interview time and process. This highlighted that participants could request the recording be paused, stopped and/or deleted at any time, participation was voluntary, and that participants could withdraw at any time. It also highlighted that participants’ involvement and contributions would be anonymous and that the data would be kept secure and confidential at all times.
An interview guide accompanied the letter. This guide was designed to provide an outline of the nature and broad subject matter of the interview. The letter and interview guide did not stipulate that participants were required to formally prepare for the interview in any way apart from making time available to be interviewed. The letter also included a consent form that willing participants were asked to complete as a formal record of their agreement to participate.

Potential participants were asked to respond directly to the research supervisor. The supervisor prepared a list of willing participants that was sent to the researcher. The researcher then followed up with each willing participant by email. A sample copy of this email is attached as Appendix 3.3.

A full list of interview dates along with details about their length in time and word count can be found in Appendix 3.3. This list does not include the physical location of the interviews as this could have made it easy to identify the associated participant. All participants were given a numerical reference number and when quoted in the text are identified by that reference number.

3.3.3.5 Interviews

The interviews took place within a four-month period of time. Some demographic data was collected to form an analytical reference point, and as a basis to begin the interview, however none of this data was used for analytical purposes. The interview response rates, dates and times have been kept and, if required, it could be feasible to repeat the research interview process to test reliability (Patton 2002).

All interviews were one-off and continuous in nature. Each interview mirrored the classic semi-structured open approach and discussion flowed smoothly (Patton 2002). The researcher conducted all of the interviews along with high level note taking. All interviews were digitally recorded, downloaded onto a personal computer, converted to a CD disc, and transcribed verbatim.
Appropriate protocols to conduct interviews were observed (Charmaz 2006; Yin 1989), and the researcher was confident the interviews were professional and enjoyable for both interviewer and interviewee. All participants were reminded that their comments would be only referenced by a neutral code. Further, the participants were offered the opportunity to verify the transcription of their interview and the opportunity to receive a copy of the summary of the research findings.

3.3.3.6 Interview process

The interviews commenced with a brief overview by the researcher. This included the subject area of the research and the four key elements of the questionnaire. The researcher emphasised their interest in gaining the participants’ insights from their actual experience within the sector given the research’s aim to increase of the body of knowledge relating to tertiary education sector institutional collaboration, including the replication of exemplars of best practice. All participants referred to the interview guide in some manner and some clearly had used the guide for preparation, while others had simply used it as a ‘memory jogger’ immediately prior to the interview.

During the interviews, the order in which the questions were asked varied as a result of how participants’ responded to questions early in the interview. That is, the researcher did not adhere strictly to the list of questions; instead, the sequence of questions was tailored based on how the participants responded to each question. This involved the researcher being an ‘active listener’; thinking when best to direct the interview rather than following a preset script. Further, the nature of the interviews evolved over the duration of the data collection phase and responses were increasingly probed rather than simply recorded and collated for analysis. For example, additional questions along the lines of exploring actions and processes rather than capturing specific descriptions were asked. These ‘follow-up’ questions would use phrases such as: ‘What did you think about that?’; ‘What happened then?’; ‘What are your views now?’; ‘Looking back, what are the critical success factors?’ This all meant the interviews became more iterative, directed by the content and nature of the participants’ contributions, rather than being rigidly bound by the original questionnaire and interview guide. Nevertheless, the evolving dialogue was drawn from within the ‘canvas’ or boundaries created by the ‘preset’ questions. This was in line with the intended approach and
methodology selected for the research and suitably reflected a grounded theory framework (Charmaz 2006).

In addition, the interviews were conversational in nature and most of the dialogue could be described as spontaneous and emergent rather than restrictive and controlled (Miles & Huberman 1994). This combination of flexibility and control within the interview facilitated a more transparent description of events that ensured they were an accurate description rather than a recollection adjusted by hindsight. This, in turn, provides a stronger foundation of analytical insight for subsequent theory building.

As the interviews progressed, and as anticipated given the research methodology adopted, themes, images and models were articulated by participants, iterated within interviews, reflected upon between interviews, and subsequently woven into later interviews. Adherence to the selected research methodology mitigated the risk of the researcher forming firm views early in the research process, which could have narrowed the scope to uncover new material in later interviews and may have created a ‘filter’ that meant the researcher only ‘heard’ material that reinforced this initial thinking. In addition, the practices of qualitative research is to consider all aspects of the data collected, not just the data that appears to be the most relevant to the research problem. This has been described as focusing on both the ‘functional’ and ‘dysfunctional’ aspects of data as described by Podolny and Page (1998).

At times during the data collection phase, a concept that had been implied by an earlier participant would become more explicit. During some interviews, particularly in the latter part of the interview, answers to particular questions were revisited and asked again. The purpose of this was to identify if, once reflected upon, the participant would provide new or more insightful contributions. In addition, at the end of each interview participants were given the opportunity to revisit earlier contributions to allow them to clarify or possibly reinforce points as well as introduce new material not covered during the interview. Further, data from early interviews were introduced into later interviews to challenge the researcher’s initial thinking. The resulting contributions were further reviewed and reflected upon. This led to the utilisation of abductive reasoning, which is a synthesis of inductive and deductive reasoning (Charmaz 2006). Abductive reasoning involves considering all possible explanations for the data being examined; from this, hypotheses are developed to confirm or
disconfirm the possible explanations until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data (Charmaz 2006). The data analysis process is described in the next section of this chapter.

In summary, the interviews were characterised by an underlying tone of mutual trust, rapport and respect. The interview participants indicated their support in terms of the value of the research and to some extent, provided an appraisal of the fit, relevance, workability and modifiability of the study (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967). These concepts are examined further in section 3.3.6.

3.3.4 Data analysis and theory building

3.3.4.1 Introduction

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the researcher adopted a grounded theory approach to data analysis and theory building (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998). The researcher also drew upon Patton (2002) and Miles and Huberman (1994) to provide some alternative qualitative data analytical perspectives to assist in refining the framework for designing and executing the data analysis process. Other perspectives were considered, including the five-step method for data analysis espoused by Sarantakos (1993). Further, the use of qualitative analytical software such as nVivo was considered to assist in sorting and analysing data but was not used.

Following discussion with the researcher’s supervisor, the researcher decided more could be gained by the researcher becoming intimately familiar with the data through constant reading and listening to the interviews. The constant personal iteration with the data by the researcher is a hallmark of what facilitates theoretical robustness within grounded theory research methodology. In lay terms, ‘sleeping with the data’ facilitates the underlying aim of grounded theory to uncover ‘what is going on’ (Charmaz 2006).
3.3.4.2 Analytical technique

Coding

The key underlying element to data analysis in grounded theory is the process of coding data. The coding process involves allocating a descriptive term to each piece of data. The allocated code places the labelled text into some form of concise taxonomy that can be sorted, compared and grouped. It is the first stage of forming data into a manageable format so it can be analysed (Charmaz 2006).

There are numerous approaches to coding (Strauss & Corbin 1994). This research adopted an initial coding nomenclature that developed after the pilot interview was completed. This base level of coding identified data within the interview transcripts that had research significance. In a sense, the codes act as nascent theories in their own right, not only initially describing a concept – a description of what is going on in the research area – but also acting as way-finders to further data collection and analytical reflection. As the coding process proceeds, it progressively integrates the initial nascent snippets into more abstract concepts or categories which can then be iterated back into the original data.

The research then applied axial coding to the data. Axial coding involves treating a category as an ‘axis’ around which the researcher establishes linkages and relationships across the data. The main purpose of axial coding is to bring coherence to the granulated data again after it has been dissected through the line-by-line initial coding by reassembling them as a group or category (Charmaz 2006). Axial coding provides more structure to the data analysis process than if this analysis was based solely on the initial or first level of coding. The axial coding process helped form the data around what, why, when and how type questions which are vital to get to the core of what is going on in the data. In turn, these groups facilitate the emergence of the major contributions to the body of knowledge. Put simply, the data from the interview transcripts evolve into concepts and the relationship between these concepts could, for example, by a diagrammatic model, become a possible theory of explanation.

Axial coding does have risks (Glaser 1998; Kelle 2005). These include the risk of forcing data into preconceived perceptions. These perceptions could be developed during the
literature review process or could be the result of the personal bias of the researcher. Ways of mitigating this risk include the use of techniques such as memoing, theoretical sampling and continual recoding. These techniques are used to maximise objective analysis rather than applying a mechanistic tool to force data through an analytical model that then delivers a theory.

Focused coding was also used during the data analysis phase of this study. Focused coding is where the most frequent terms used in the first phase of coding are re-applied to the data during a second phase. In turn, these areas of focus become categories and in turn, these categories become concepts (Charmaz 2006).

Coding in research provides a disciplined mechanism for initially sorting data, from which the data can be more abstractly analysed leading to the formation of theories. As such, by handling the data via the creation of increasingly abstract constructs, the process of identifying generic actions and activity emerges (Prus 1987).

**Memos**

Another technique used in the data analysis process of grounded theory research is the use of memos. Memos are a ‘note to self’ as opposed to a business memo, and are prepared in a format that most advances the researcher’s thinking (Charmaz 2006). Memos can be written in informal language, and can also be manifested as elements in draft versions of thesis chapters. Based on the data collected, memos serve to flag, reflect and refine the researcher’s thinking about what is possibly going on within that data. Memos can cover questions such as: What are people saying?; What might lie beneath what they are saying?; What is the underlying structure and/or context for that particular contribution?; How does it relate to other contributions made by the same participant/by others?; and what patterns are emerging?

Memos also force focus on what might emerge as first points of reference for theory building. The process of composing memos, like coding, is iterative. Indeed, the iteration process is now extended so that the researcher interacts between data-code-memo and from data direct to memo to continually challenge contributions and the assumptions attached to them.
Categorising in grounded theory occurs after the researcher has grouped coded data that have similar properties and characteristics (Charmaz 2006). These groups represent the synthesis of large amounts of data fragments and may incorporate numerous codes. Further, categories are conceptual elements within a theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) that make clear ideas reflected in the collected data.

How the coding, memoing and categorising techniques of grounded theory were applied to this study is discussed in the next section.

3.3.4.3 Data analysis process

Figure 3.3 illustrates at a high level the iterative process from data to analysis to concept to theory, which underpins the data analysis process of grounded theory that was adopted for this study.

Figure 3.3 Illustration of iterative process: data, analysis, concept, theory

Source: Developed for this research
All interview transcripts were initially coded using either phrases or full sentences as the coding unit of measure. Proposed codes were vetted against the following checklist, which was derived from Charmaz (2006):

1. Coding reflects the described contribution;
2. The code does more than simply reorder and resort extant knowledge;
3. The code could encourage the researcher to think and in turn analyse;
4. This thinking would enhance the construction of analytical linkages between codes and data.

As the data collection process progressed the initial codes were continually re-tested against data collected later using the focus coding approach. When the iterative coding process was complete, a refined set of code terms had been created and developed into a coding matrix. In addition, during this iterative process of refining the coding terms, the data was also being progressively grouped into interpretative categories. These initial categories began to provide the basis of abstract theoretical concepts.

The initial coding matrix was developed as the interviews, interview notes, and memos were written up and was finalised before the transcripts were coded as a block of work.

Coding was relatively specific; over 50 initial codes were developed, and as much as possible, codes were written in an active rather than passive fashion. Codes were process and action orientated rather than being a description of events. In addition, the codes largely used simple language to represent the plain meaning of words. This created basic building blocks to manage the data and facilitated the ease of data comparison (Charmaz 2006). The emotion and nuances associated with a coded contribution could be captured where relevant; this approach ensured the data was placed within context and was analysed rather than being simply grouped into collections of similar statements.

Some of the codes that were used could be described as *in vivo* codes (Charmaz 2006; Strauss & Corbin 1998). An *in vivo* code is when a colloquial or commonly known term is used that implies more than the actual definition of the words being used. For example, the code ‘shot gun wedding’ conveys a sense of compulsion due to a contextual situation; there is also a considerable sense of what the parties involved may be feeling. Some *in vivo* codes that were
taken directly from the transcript ‘fast tracked’ into becoming categories. Other *in vivo* codes were derived or abducted from the data.

This research conducted a line-by-line coding approach of the interview transcripts, with the codes used for coding resulting directly from the content of the research data. This approach maximises the accuracy of the participant contribution. The coding process also involved using axial and focused coding to assist with sorting and analysing the 12.5 hours of interview transcripts that were collected. The coded data was then grouped into categories, which in turn evolved into initial theoretical concepts that were further iterated back on to the data. After numerous iterations of this process, a clear picture of theories emerged that potentially addressed the why, what and how of the research problem of inter-institutional collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

The coding process was particularly apt because it facilitated a consistent and straightforward way of comparing all the data collected from the interview participants. This analytical technique provides the basis of concepts that lead to theories. As the coding progresses, memos are written that capture initial thoughts that can be subsequently tested as the data collection proceeds. These memos also provide a refinement of the coding framework that has been applied to date and how it can be made more insightful for data collection to come. This new insight is also applied retrospectively to the data already collected and analysed. Through this constant iteration of comparison between codes and data, both prospectively and retrospectively, the codes can be grouped into concepts that are progressively theoretical in their orientation due to the constant iteration of analysis. Each cycle of comparison creates distance from the original data. The concepts that evolve from the constant analysis become more abstract and so more theoretical, resulting in a theoretical framework.

As the data collection process progressed, the coding framework evolved. All of the data was ultimately coded using the final coding matrix to identify more focused and insightful commentary about the research problem. A copy of the final coding matrices used for this research is included in Appendix 4.2. The researcher consciously ensured there was a time period between the initial coding and subsequent data analysis. This is considered to assistance in analytical robustness and facilitates a more conceptual next phase of analysis (Charmaz 2006).
Analytical ideas were not only developed from the coding of interviews. During each interview the researcher took handwritten notes which effectively became the first manifestation of the grounded theory technique of ‘memoing’ (Charmaz 2006). These handwritten notes remained in that form and were then used to form the base of more refined memos, or notes on notes. These self-reflective memos led to the formation of preliminary theoretical frameworks and models of best practice that were then overlaid onto the data as it was progressively collected and collated. The handwritten notes and memos along with the audio and verbatim transcripts were re-examined multiple times and used to supplement the coded transcripts. In addition to memos formed from the handwritten interview notes, memos were also drafted at other times during the research process. This included following attendance at research symposiums and following reflective thought during the researcher’s professional working day. As well as short paragraphs of text, memos took the form of diagrams and sketches along with one-page summations. This technique within grounded theory is sometimes referred to as ‘clustering’ (Charmaz 2006).

The use of diagrams is regarded by some grounded theorists (Clarke 2003; Strauss & Corbin 1998) as being an intrinsic part of grounded theory research methods. Within this study, diagrams were used in particular in the development of possible explanatory models for practical application in the field. An example of a diagram used during the memoing process is included in Appendix 3.4. This diagram was an attempt to create a flow chart of key stages for preparation for collaboration and postulated a ‘tool kit’ algorithm for practitioners to follow. Further, an example of a diagram that was developed to illustrate a practical application for leaders is included in Appendix 3.5. This use of diagrams for this purpose has been described as conceptual mapping and provides a link to the methodology of symbiotic interactionalism (Clarke 2003). Conceptual mapping is a complement to what lies at the heart of grounded theory, which was once famously proclaimed as: “All is data.” (Glaser 2001, p. 145).

The handwritten notes that were made during interviews recorded thoughts and insights as well as comments on the nature of a participant’s contribution. For example, whether the participant was at ease or used emotive language, which may not easily be conveyed in an interview recording or transcript. It is interesting to note that during an intense period of data
collection when 12 interviews took place over a two-week period, the writing of memos intensified. This represented an intense period of thinking about the contributions that had been made in relation to the research problem and sought to capture the many insights and ideas that were emerging for the researcher.

The memo process was particularly useful in identifying the key insights and elements pertinent to the research problem. These insights were used to develop initial concepts and to reflect those concepts back onto existing data; the concepts were also examined during subsequent interviews. Each memo provided a distinctive and fresh perspective, always evolving from the data, which reinforced the iteration between data and analysis. On occasion the process of memoing facilitated the merging or further refining of codes to better capture data meaning and implication.

Memos were the ‘engine room’ that integrated data from codes into categories. Through this process, memos acted as the conduit for the creation of progressively more abstract categories that provided the basis for theoretical sampling and sorting of data. Theoretical sampling is the mechanism for reviewing categories to identify themes or insights that could form the basis for theory building. As a result, it is focused on trends and insights abstracted from the data rather than analysing a participant’s specific contribution within the data. Further, it facilitates delineation of category properties and checking of initial thoughts, helps clarify the relationship between categories, and highlights similarities and variations within the data collection process (Charmaz 2006).

Theoretical sampling enhances category specificity and precision, promotes analysis rather than mere description, and assists the undertaking of more abstract and generalisable analysis. Further, it explicates the analytic linkages within the categories and facilitates parsimony, emphasising the core enablers rather than listing every conceivable enabler (Charmaz 2006). As a result of theoretical sampling, categories evolved, merged and disaggregated. This process assisted the progression of data to theory rather than the data providing little more than a narrative of events.

Like other techniques used in grounded theory, theoretical sampling is an iterative process that involves constantly returning to the data to ‘retrace your steps’ and ensure any resultant
theory building remains data grounded (Charmaz 2006). This journey of constant comparison is very much in keeping with the grounded theory approach advanced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), and is useful in identifying the key elements within the data. The researcher utilised theoretical sampling in returning to data multiple times to look for theoretical insights.

3.3.4.4 Data saturation

As outlined earlier, data saturation in grounded theory occurs when no new insights are gained from the application of analytical techniques to the data, rather than at the point where new data contributes no new information to what has already been collected. The researcher reached a point of data saturation when no new category could be formed from the data analysis. The process of reaching data saturation within grounded theory is illustrated in Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4 The process of reaching ‘data saturation’
The point of data saturation occurred before all of the interviews had been conducted. However, the data collection proceeded to ensure as wide a contribution from leaders in the tertiary education sector could be gained and to ensure the research findings were as robust and generalisable as possible.

3.3.4.5 Theory building

The first distinct phase of the theory building process within grounded theory involves undertaking comparisons within the data to reveal similarities and distinctions. In that sense, constant comparison within the data is a critical ingredient to ensure robustness (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The earlier process of sorting the data, creating diagrams, and composing memos all contribute. This is achieved by increasing the degree of distance or analytical abstractness from the data, to the robustness of the subsequent formation of theories as well as the generalisability of the learnings uncovered.

The second stage of theory building involves the constant comparison across all forms of data analysis. This includes comparing the codes to the categories that have been formed and comparing memos with these categories; collectively this constant comparison develops increasingly theoretical concepts. As this process neared completion, each new perspective was taken back through the existing data analysis. Initially, this process informed the refinement of codes, concepts and categories. As this process progressed, new perspectives informed the refinement of memos, which in turn, formed the basis of draft thesis chapters. Overall, this process facilitated an ever deepening understanding of the data. The researcher maintained a closeness with the data throughout the process, allowing the varied experiences and nuances of each interview to be comprehensively captured, while exploring emerging themes and patterns leading to ‘new learning’.

Through the data analysis process described above, initial theories were developed. Following this, the researcher once again reviewed the various stages of data analysis to test, confirm, refine and reinforce the emergent theoretical findings. These findings are examined and discussed in Chapter 4.
3.3.5 Research limitations

There were few significant limitations impacting this research. The most notable potential limitation was the reliance on a relatively small sample size for the research. Nevertheless, the sample was a proportionately high representation of the available population. Some 17 out of a total population pool of 28 tertiary education leaders were interviewed for this study.

The major issue relating to small sample sizes and a high participation rate in research is the issue of non-response bias (Armstrong & Overton 1997). This is the risk of the sample not being representative of the full views of the total population. Within this research, the most likely manifestation of non-response bias was if the actual sample did not include representatives from both universities and the institute of technology and polytechnic sector. The data collection process did include representatives from both groups.

Further, a possible research limitation relating to non-response bias, which could have occurred if there had not been sufficient diversity across the sample pool in terms of size of operation or geographical location; that is, if only large organisations located in one part of the country had been included in the sample. The data sample for this study included participants from institutions located throughout the country, and from institutions that ranged from large universities to small regional polytechnics.

The study was not hampered by any other limitations that were beyond the researcher’s control, for example, a wide spread unwillingness of potential participants to be interviewed or logistical difficulties that prevented interviews from occurring.

Delimitations relating to this research were discussed in section 1.7 of Chapter 1.
3.3.6  **Validity and reliability**

3.3.6.1  **Validity**

There were a number of measures that were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of this research that are discussed in this section. It is important to note that within grounded theory, validity in traditional terms is less of an issue in regard to theoretical robustness; instead emphasis is placed on fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967).

‘Fit’ refers to how closely the concepts uncovered relate to what is being investigated. This is achieved by the researcher constantly comparing events described by participants to concepts that the researcher has formed from analysing those incidents. Relevance places greater value on the utility of what is being studied for practical application rather than on pure academic interest. Workability is the term favoured in comparison to generalisability. Workability describes the extent to which the research findings can be practically applied to differing scenarios without too much variation in application. In terms of this research, workability would relate to the findings being utilised by tertiary education institutions in other countries in the western world. Modifiability describes the degree to which the research can incorporate any new relevant data. As discussed in the section below, the researcher drew upon these criteria along with the more traditional attributes of validity and reliability in qualitative research to strengthen the robustness of findings and their connectivity with the data from which they emerged.

3.3.6.2  **Personal bias**

When conducting qualitative research, there is inevitability a risk of personal bias influencing both the research process and findings (Patton 2002). The researcher addressed the issue of personal bias by acknowledging that such bias could exist. This ‘up front and personal’ context is a hallmark of qualitative research. Further, the researcher continually reflected on the potential impact of this bias to ensure this was considered throughout the research process. This approach of open disclosure and awareness of potential bias contributed to the integrity, soundness and defensibility of this research.
The researcher was particularly aware that the data collection process could be impacted by personal bias and that the data collected could be tainted by contextual shortcomings or factual inaccuracy. Grounded theory considers that the risk of this can be mitigated by undertaking a refined level of data abstractness (Charmaz 2006). In addition, grounded theory suggests that such bias could be viewed as another variable in the research and that a researcher could analyse their own biases and its impact on the research they are undertaking (Glaser 2004).

3.3.6.3 Population sample

One of the major criticisms of grounded theory research is that population samples are purposefully selected (Huber 1991). For this research, the researcher did not purposefully select participants. As outlined in section 3.3.3, the researcher’s supervisor managed the process of sending out invitations to participate and the participant selection process. The option of ‘selecting’ was available to control the sample size and keep it manageable. As discussed earlier in this chapter, given the total population size was 28, it was decided that all willing participants would be ‘selected’ to be involved. Given the small size of the total possible population, achieving some form of random sampling that would still provide robust and generalisable results was likely to be problematic.

3.3.6.4 Data collection

To maximise rigour, validity and reliability, the data collection methodology was based on the following approach, which was influenced by Patton (2002):

1. Research questions were clear and easy to understand;
2. Interview participant selection was undertaken in a purposeful, rather than random, way;
3. Protocols for undertaking the semi-structured open interviews were adopted.

In addition, the temptation to overly control the actual interviews was mitigated by the researcher. This allowed each participant to place their perspective, whether new or a repetition of previous data, within their particular context. Although the researcher was an
active participant (Seidman 1998) to engage and at times challenge the participants’ responses, a review of the interview transcripts would indicate that participants were not ‘imposed upon’ or ‘led astray’ in any way.

During any interview process, there was also a risk of ‘one shot interviewing’ (Smith 2003). This is where the data captured from an interview is taken at ‘face value’ and there is no ability to triangulate the contribution to assess its accuracy. The researcher mitigated the risk of this occurring by ensuring each subsequent interview drew upon the data that had been derived from earlier interviews. In addition, during the interviews the researcher took opportunities to get participants to revisit contributions they had made earlier in the interview to see if they had any subsequent, and potentially more developed, thoughts on their earlier contribution.

The researcher also used the technique of ‘member checking’ (Charmaz 2006) during the interview. This involves the researcher reflecting themes or categories that have emerged in earlier interviews and introducing or testing them in subsequent interviews, to garner additional insight and analytical depth.

As discussed in section 3.3.3, the nature of the participants meant they had considerable conversational skills, the ability to think on their feet, and could articulate complex responses upon simple prompting. Consequently, there is the risk that such skills could allow participants to manipulate their contributions. However, the number of interviews that were undertaken and the data analysis process of constantly reviewing contributions across the range of the data, and progressively becoming more abstract in how that data is described, reduced this risk.

Care was taken to avoid over confidence during data collection to ensure that later interviews were not simply ‘rubber stamping’ previous data collected or the researcher merely ‘going through the motions’. The researcher was also conscious of the issue of confirmability. This is where early data can influence how the researcher assesses data collected later. This was counteracted by a combination of acknowledging that this risk may occur, being aware of it throughout the data collection process, and adhering to the research disciplines described in this section.
3.3.6.5 Data analysis

The research incorporated a degree of structure and formality in the data analysis process. As outlined earlier in the chapter, the researcher used an iterative and progressively defined coding paradigm to emphasise validation and systemic analysis within the data collected. This methodology complemented, rather than simply repeated, what emerged from the data. It also provided a variety of analytical perspectives and gave the researcher multiple ‘lenses’ to view the data, which enhanced the transportability of the findings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 1991). This, in turn, assisted in offsetting the potential risk of the data analysis being constrained by a predetermined mental construct to the manner in which data was to be analysed.

There is a recognised risk that the grounded theory process of data analysis can facilitate over simplification in an attempt to achieve generalisability of the findings. This has been described as conceptualising ‘latent patterns’ (Glaser 2002). As a result, the researcher needs to take care not to over-simplify the data analysis to avoid the risk of ‘divorcing’ the data from its context.

The memoing process used in data analysis was also useful in data validity and reliability in that it gave the researcher multiple opportunities to reflect and consider issues such as fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Lofland & Lofland 1995). It also assisted in managing the risks associated with the researcher becoming overly intimate and too familiar with the data leading to poor delineation and a tendency to ‘lump’ like statements together. In turn, this facilitated greater validity and reliability as the analytical process became more of a strategy to learn from the data rather than simply a procedure to manage the data into convenient groupings that might facilitate clarity and generalisability.

A further risk during the data analysis process relates to the theoretical codes being derived from the literature review rather than from the data collected. Or, put another way, the data is analysed in the way that merely confirms a common sense interpretation of the reviewed literature (Schultz 1967). In contrast, the analysis undertaken by this research was abducted from the data that was collected and was not unduly influenced by the literature review. In
addition, the degree of abstractness was enhanced by having the data analysis occur almost a year after the data was collected and the initial coding process had taken place. Data credibility was strengthened by the considerable degree of reflection that resulted from both the research process and the elapsed time between the various research stages.

3.3.6 Data integrity issues (data collected and data to theory)

Audio recording was selected as the main form of data collection as it was considered as a means of accurately capturing data in a way that did not hinder the interview process, which may have occurred if the researcher had relied on note-taking alone. The recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription agency. This mitigated the risk of the researcher focusing on a specific interview for a considerable time and possibly becoming over-attached to that particular contribution.

Coding the transcripts multiple times coalesced thoughts and patterns, facilitated theories emerging, and revealed a diversity of ideas; each providing a possible area of future research. This continual iteration suggested new research areas to consider and possible theories to build. The coding process took place once all of the interviews had been transcribed, rather than as each transcript was produced.

Data was analysed by the same person who conducted the interview. This reduced the likelihood of a contribution being interpreted differently and from two distinct perspectives.

Table 3.7 in section 3.3.3 provided a summary of the quality assessment strategies used during the data collection and aspects of the data analysis phases.

The chapter now discusses issues relating to the ethical aspects of this research.
3.4 Ethical issues

3.4.1 Background

At all times, the researcher followed the ethical approval guidelines of Southern Cross University. Ethical issues were considered at each stage of the research process and steps taken to address and mitigate these (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Neumann 2006; Patton 2002). These aspects are discussed below. No data collection occurred until ethical aspects of the research design were approved by the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee (approval number ECN-08-032).

3.4.2 Ethical information

Information relating to ethical aspects of the research was provided to participants at each stage of the data collection process. All participants were informed when they received the written request to participate in the research study about Southern Cross University’s ethical guidelines and were asked to sign an interview consent form. An example of the documentation relating to ethical considerations that were sent to each invited participant can be found in Appendix 3.1.

Participants were also told that the information collected would not be attributable and that the research had been approved by the Ethics Committee of Southern Cross University. Participants also received information about how they could raise any issues of concern to the Ethics Committee.

Participants were reminded verbally prior to the interview commencing that they could withdraw at any time or request the audio taping to be halted. No participant withdrew from the research process and no participant requested the audio recording be either halted or retrospectively edited in any way. In addition, all participants were offered the opportunity to verify their respective transcript; however none chose to do so.

As described in the data collection process section above, the participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. It was
acknowledged by participants that the research would be published as part of the doctoral thesis and may also be used as the basis for conference papers, journal articles and similar materials. It was stressed that the information provided would be kept anonymous and confidential and that the researcher would disguise all participants in the thesis and any subsequent material.

Specifically the participants were informed:

You can be assured that all data collected in this interview will remain confidential and anonymous. In addition, for the safety and benefit of yourself, and your institution and its employees, I will disguise the name of your institution in my final research thesis to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, along with any other identifying details.

Could I please tape record this interview as it will assist me greatly with the data analysis? If you agree, please feel free to ask me to push the ‘pause’ button of the tape recorder at any time during the interview. Furthermore, you can terminate your involvement in this research at any time. Do you have any further questions regarding the objective or procedure of the interview? After the data analysis is completed I can provide you with a summary report of the findings if you wish.

This statement reflected the written information provided to participants in the original documentation that accompanied the letter inviting them to participate (see Appendix 3.1).

3.4.3 Risk to participants/undue influence

The nature of the interview was non-personal and non-controversial and there was a low level of risk for participants’ involvement. In addition, participants had a professional interest in the pursuit of academic research and were well aware of the notion and practical application of ethical and robust research techniques. Given the nature of the roles the participants held, they were comfortable and confident in the interview setting. All
interview participants held senior leadership roles and were not in any way compromised due to issues related to age, gender, race or professional status.

Nevertheless, the researcher still adhered to the ethical guidelines adopted for this study to ensure no participant felt that their involvement in the research undermined or compromised their relationship with the researcher or their standing in the sector.

Such mitigation actions included the following:

1. Participants freely volunteered to be interviewed and did not feel obliged or pressured to do so.
2. No participant was chosen for any reason other than their willingness to be interviewed.
3. Participation only occurred after informed consent had been understood and obtained;
4. As much as possible privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. It is important to note that the roles held by the interview participants are of public record, which means their potential involvement would be easily identified;
5. To the best of the researcher’s ability and professional integrity, there was no deception in the research. For example, there was no covert research of individuals undertaken.

All participants signed the appropriate consent form, which is included in Appendix 3.1, and no participant requested the recording to be paused, stopped or deleted at any time. No participant wished to validate their recordings, and most offered to be available for any further information or clarification if this would benefit the research.

3.4.4 Anonymity

The methods of data collection were conducted in a manner that ensured as much anonymity and privacy as possible.

All eligible participants, being the vice-chancellors or chief executives of New Zealand tertiary institutions (sample size of 28) were contacted by the researcher’s supervisor, with the original intention of ensuring 8-12 interviews would be completed. All correspondence was on Southern Cross University letterhead with the return address being the supervisor’s.
A letter of explanation and interview guideline were included. A copy of these documents is included in Appendix 3.1.

The total population of possible institution leaders were approached to be interviewed. The research supervisor was to make a random selection if the number of respondents exceeded a manageable number required, while also ensuring there were at least two respondents of each of the two sub-sectors of tertiary education being studied, namely universities and institutes of technology and polytechnics. This approach attempted to ensure that the researcher was not at any time aware of who among those approached did not want to take part in the research or who was willing to participate but was not selected for the final group. However, given the involvement of the researcher within the sector an attempt to keep the selection process ‘blind’ was regarded as unlikely to succeed. In addition, it seemed more appropriate to be up-front given most, though not all, of the participants would know of the researcher to some degree. As a result, all 17 willing potential participants were interviewed for the study. This decision was also influenced by the researcher’s aim of ensuring the research was informed by as wide a representation of the sector as possible.

The risk of maintaining anonymity within the research collection and subsequent dissemination of findings was to some extent mitigated by maximising the number of participants rather than curtailing the number of interviews when data saturation in a traditional research approach had occurred (Patton 2002). The larger the number of participants in a study, the harder it is to identify the individual contributor of specific findings.

Where contributions are quoted directly, the contributors have been given a numerical reference point to maintain their anonymity.

3.4.5 Benefit of the research to the participant

There was no direct benefit from participating for the participants. The possible indirect benefit was the study’s goal of providing an empirical-based piece of research that could provide useful models and guidelines to improve inter-institutional collaborative activity across the tertiary education sector.
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology that was adopted for this research. It also outlined the data collection and data analysis processes, discussed the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability, and detailed the ethical measures associated with the study.

3.5.1 Research framework and methodology

The chapter started by discussing the process used to select a theoretical framework and research methodology for the research. As outlined in section 3.2.3, grounded theory was chosen as the most appropriate framework within which to undertake a study that focused on accessing the direct and personal experiences of leaders within the tertiary education sector. Alternative frameworks and methodologies were considered, however these all leaned towards research that involved proving or testing a hypothesis. In contrast, the researcher was seeking a framework that would maximise the emergence of new knowledge for practical application within the tertiary education sector. Grounded theory, with its focus on theory building derived from constant iteration with research data (Charmaz 2006), was considered to be the most appropriate theoretical framework and methodology to be adopted for this study. The critical tipping point for the researcher was the realisation that more rich depth of material, and more willing participants from the population set, could occur if the research approach avoided testing a theory while gathering data from sector leaders.

3.5.2 Data collection process

Once grounded theory had been selected as the theoretical framework and methodology for the study, the researcher considered various instruments and methods to collect data. The challenge was to implement a data capture process that would occur after some participant self-reflection, maximised free flowing dialogue and thought development, and also permitted the participant to self-reflect, whether prompted or not by the researcher. The method also needed to be logistically possible and fit for the nature of the participants.
Undertaking interviews using a semi-structured interview technique (Patton 2002) conducted at a time and place that suited the participant was considered to be the optimal approach to meet this criteria.

An interview questionnaire and supporting documentation were prepared for use in the data collection process. Copies of these documents are included in Appendix 3.1. The questionnaire was designed to provide an appropriate degree of formality and professionalism. The purpose of this was to indicate the scope and nature of the research area and to secure the participation of potential participants. The researcher utilised Patton (2002) and Charmaz (2006) in the design of the questionnaire.

3.5 Data sample size

The data sample for this research was vice-chancellors of New Zealand universities and chief executives of polytechnics or institutes of technology. The total population from this sample was 28. As outlined in section 3.3.2, data saturation within grounded theory relates to the point at which no new knowledge emerges from the data analysis, rather than being based on sample population size or where no new data emerges from the collection process.

The participant selection processes was managed by the researcher’s supervisor to ensure the researcher was not aware of those participants that were not willing to be involved or who were willing and not selected. As described in section 3.3.2, the attempt to incorporate some form of selection ‘blindness’ was undermined by the small size of the population and the familiarity of the researcher within the sector. Subsequently, it was decided that all willing participants would be interviewed for the research to increase the degree of generalisability of the findings from a wider sample set than originally envisaged, and as a professional courtesy to those participants who indicated their willingness to be involved.

3.4.4 Interview process

The chapter progressed to outline the logistical process undertaken to approach the data sample to invite them to be involved in the research, and the number, timing and settings for the interviews.
Effectively the interviews took the form of free flowing discussions. The interview questionnaire was used as a starting point from which participants shared their experiences and learnings about collaborative activities they had been involved in. The interviews reflected a mix of formality, from the questionnaire, and flexibility, in the way the researcher allowed participants to follow their thought patterns and self-reflect on early statements later in the interview. This technique was fitting given the grounded theory approach being taken for the study. At times, the research prompted participants to further elaborate with comments such as: ‘tell me more’ and ‘given you said something previously, how does that fit with this more recent contribution’ during the interview. This attempted to bring more out of the participants’ vast knowledge and clarify exact meanings and opinions. In addition, at times the researcher introduced data that had been collected from earlier participants for later participants to reflect and comment upon.

3.5.5 Data analysis

The data analysis process centred on iteratively coding transcript material into progressively more abstract concepts, supplemented by the use of memos to capture thoughts and analytical reflections. The constant interaction with the data, the evolving process of coding, and the continual composition of memos sought to ensure the analysis was data grounded. In grounded theory, analytical robustness is enhanced by constantly comparing data with analysis at each stage of data collection (Charmaz 2006).

3.5.6 Data validity and reliability

A number of approaches were taken to ensure the research was as robust as possible. This included following best practice techniques for qualitative research in general, and adopting techniques integral to grounded theory. These techniques sought to address issues relating to personal bias, sample size, data collection, data analysis and data integrity. These techniques also sought to address the grounded theory criteria of fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967).
3.5.7 Ethics

Ethical considerations were acknowledged and incorporated into the research methodology with a particular focus on ensuring research participants were not unduly pressured to be involved or compromised by their participation. Care was taken at all times to ensure participants remained as anonymous as possible.

3.5.8 Summary

This chapter focused on the selection and implementation of a research methodology to address the research problem of how the previous experience of tertiary education institution leaders can be utilised to advance collaborative activity in the sector as a whole. The next chapter outlines the contributions that resulted from the data collection and analysis processes. These findings endorsed the selection of grounded theory as the most apposite theoretical framework and research methodology to collect the experiences of leaders within the tertiary sector and identify contributions and new knowledge that could potentially be practically applied to the New Zealand tertiary education sector as a whole.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of this study and discusses the analytical process from which the initial findings were refined into final contributions to the existing body of knowledge about institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. It is important to note that this chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data collected for this study; conclusions from the research findings along with recommendations for practical application are discussed in the next chapter.

The chapter is comprised of five main sections.

1. Background – this section provides an overview of the research journey to date. It provides a brief outline of the research problem along with the research methodology and data collection process used for this study.

2. Analysis to findings – the mechanisms used to present and analyse the findings that resulted from the data collection process are discussed in this section.

3. Findings – the findings that emerged from the data analysis process are outlined in this part of the chapter.

4. Summary – a summary of the main findings.

5. Conclusion – a conclusion to this chapter and an introduction of the topics to be discussed in Chapter 5.
4.2 Background

As outlined in previous chapters, this study utilised a grounded theory theoretical framework and research methodology to address the research problem of:

1. *What is the experience of leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?*
2. *How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?*

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework and research methodology of grounded theory that was used in this study. Collectively, the research methodology coupled with the theoretical approach provided the roadmap for the data to be collected, sorted and analysed. The resulting analysis forms the basis of this chapter.

As outlined in the previous chapter the data for this study was obtained from 17 face-to-face semi-structured open interviews with New Zealand tertiary education institution leaders. This data set represented a significant proportion of the possible sample. The data was in the form of digitally recorded interviews, which were then transcribed and analysed.

The previous chapter details the rationale for the data collection process and sample set selected for this study. Tertiary education institution leaders were selected to access the vast collective knowledge of professionals who are ultimately responsible for the collaborative activity that takes place within the tertiary education sector. Undertaking face-to-face interviews with these leaders was identified as being an appropriate way of deriving rich insights from which theories could emerge and new knowledge for practical application within the sector could be identified. A semi-structured interview process was considered the most effective way of gaining these insights in a manner that was fitting for the data sample and that allowed their contributions to be provided in an unconstrained yet coherent fashion.

The nature of the sample set required a data collection approach that had some structure and conveyed a degree of professionalism while allowing the participants to provide their contribution in a relatively open and flexible manner. The data collection approach balanced
the need for form and structure while ensuring the participants could contribute in a free and unconstrained way, spending time and placing emphasis on the aspects of institutional collaboration that they considered to be most significant.

4.2.1 Subjects

The subjects for this study were university vice-chancellors and chief executives of polytechnics and institutes of technology located across both major islands of New Zealand. The sample included a mix of large metropolitan institutions and smaller regional organisations, with leaders from 10 out of the possible 19 North Island institutions and 7 out of the possible 9 South Island institutions participating in the study. The sample had significant experience in leadership roles within the tertiary education sector. The sample was made up of 14 men and 3 women, with ages in line with what could be expected with senior management roles; that is, in the over 45-years-of-age age range.

4.2.2 The data

The data collection process resulted in 12.5 hours of audio-taped interviews, comprising over 103,000 words. The 17 audio-taped interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription agency to ensure this process was independent and objective.

4.3 Analysis to findings

Chapter 3 provided a detailed overview of the data analysis process undertaken to analyse the data collected for this study. As discussed in this chapter, a grounded theory approach to data analysis and theory building was utilised.

Grounded theory has as a central tenant the concept of constant interaction with data both during the data collection process and following it (Charmaz 2006). Findings and theory-building primarily result from continual iteration with, and reflection on, the collected data. Central to this process is the development and application of codes to label, sort and group the data. The continual iterative analysis process progressively integrates each piece of data
into more abstract concepts which can be both iterated back into earlier data and provide the building blocks for theory construction.

Other grounded theory analytical techniques were used during the data analysis process, particularly the use of ‘memos’ (Charmaz 2006). Memos are a broadbrush term to describe notes, diagrams and thoughts that capture tentative ideas and represent a form of nascent theory development. Memos were taken during both the data collection and analysis processes and often formed the basis of initial models that were developed further in the preparation of the draft thesis.

The data analysis process was summarised in Figure 3.1 in section 3.3.1 of Chapter 3. This diagram illustrates the progression of data to analysis to concept to theory that underpins the development of findings and theory building for this study. This section now recaps how this approach was utilised during this research.

4.3.1 Coding

The development and application of codes to analyse the data was an evolving process. Initial thoughts about possible codes started from the first interview during the data collection process. Handwritten notes taken at the end of each interview coupled with the interview recordings being re-listened to a number of times provided a broad framework and some initial ‘headings’ to organise the data, and served as early constructs. This process had the additional benefit of re-sorting the data in headings un-associated with the source of the material, that is, specific interview participants.

The following is a list of the initial 10 broad headings:

1. Definition;
2. Trigger;
3. Motivation;
4. Institutional character;
5. Leadership;
6. Values;
7. Stakes;
8. Models of preparation;
9. Relationship process;

These headings or ‘descriptors’ were selected based on the frequency with which the terms or themes were articulated by interview participants, combined with the level of ‘intensity’ with which the participants contributed their views and experiences in relation to these themes. For example, discussions about the role of leaders in preparation for collaborative activity formed a considerable part of each interview.

All of the data was then sorted and grouped according to these headings. As a result of this phase of the analysis process, a next level of refined headings in the form of codes was developed and applied to the data. The list of these codes in relation to each of the original broad headings is included as Appendix 4.1.

The codes largely resulted from the language used by the participants during the interviews. For example, the words “size”, “proximity” and “cultural fit” were frequently used by participants to describe aspects of institutional character in relation to assessing and selecting potential partner institutions for collaboration.

In some instances, the choice of wording used for the codes resulted from the researcher selecting a term that encapsulated the concept based on the collective contributions made by participants. For example, “commitment level” was selected as a code to represent the collective contribution by participants about the impact of differing levels of commitment or attitudes towards collaboration by leaders on the corresponding success of collaborative initiatives.

The number of codes within each heading varied depending on the number of refined ‘concepts’ identified as being associated with that heading during the next level of data analysis. This process served to break down each heading into the sub-themes that related to the overall area. This process further reflects the balance of applying structure and rigour.
while providing flexibility to allow the collected data to drive the findings process, which is a precinct of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006).

In some cases, the codes were further refined and the data was again analysed according to these codes. The process of further refining the level of analysis through the development and application of codes was a way of challenging, clarifying and/or confirming the robustness of the broad heading. During the coding process the initial group of headings changed in number and the actual wording for some of the headings varied to some degree. The list of the final headings and codes that were developed during the data analysis process is outlined in Appendix 4.2.

4.3.2 Memoing

The grounded theory technique of ‘memoing’ was also utilised during the data collection and analysis processes. Memos in the form of notes and diagrams were produced during and after each interview to capture initial thoughts, ideas and early concepts that could be further reflected on as the data collection process progressed, and again during the data analysis phase. Three examples of memos taken during the data collection process are included in appendices 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5.

The first memo (Appendix 4.3) is an illustration that seeks to capture impressions from a single interview to facilitate reflective and analytical insight. The second memo (Appendix 4.4) reflects more developed thinking on the concept of collaborative preparation from the first memo. The third memo (Appendix 4.5) was an early attempt to differentiate different forms of inter-institutional activity, for example, co-planning and collaboration, and to identify the different drivers and elements that might influence these different forms, for example, whether the activity was deliberately planned or opportunistic. Further, the memo reflected possible elements that could form the basis of a theoretical framework. This memo represents the initial thinking that was eventually to develop and manifest as Figure 5.4 in section 5.4 of Chapter 5.

The memoing process increased during the data analysis process and contributed significantly to the final broad ‘headings’ or themes outlined in the next part of this section.
4.3.3 Theory development

As a result of the techniques and processes outlined above, the initial 10 broad headings that were developed as the first stage of sorting the data evolved into 7 groups that represented categories that could provide the early building blocks for theory building. The process of developing initial theories was to apply the ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions to each category. For example, why was defining the nature of a collaborative venture important during the preparatory phase; how was this done, or not done, by organisations; what could be learnt from the collective knowledge and experience of tertiary sector leaders; and how could these learnings be applied to future inter-institutional collaborative activities to increase their likelihood of success.

These questions were rigorously applied to each category to advance early thinking into more developed theories. These theories focused on the importance of specific elements that would enhance collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. From this process emerged the following five key elements or themes:

1. Motivation;
2. Institutional fit;
3. Models for operation;
4. Leadership;
5. Role of external agencies.

These themes were reviewed again and the collective findings within these themes resulted in the postulation of some conclusions and theoretical models to assist leaders in undertaking collaboration to enhance the likelihood of success.

The next section discusses the findings within each of these themes that resulted from the overall data analysis process, and introduces the overriding conclusions that are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
4.4   Research findings

4.4.1   Introduction – presentation of findings

This study into inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector resulted in five main groups of findings. These groups or themes are discussed in turn in the next part of this section and include:

1. Motivation;
2. Institutional fit;
3. Models of operation: principles, resourcing, communication and type of activity;
4. Leadership;
5. Role of external agencies.

Each group includes a number of findings relating to that theme, with each finding followed by a presentation of the supporting source data. The third section, Models of operation, includes a number of sub-sections to assist in presenting the large volume of findings and associated data in a meaningful fashion.

It is important to note that some findings are referred to in more than one section. This is because the point being made has relevance to multiple sub-themes within the general topic. This reflects the inter-relatedness of many aspects of institutional management, particularly in relation to the field of collaboration. In addition, in many cases the source data could be used to support more than one finding.

The supporting data is presented in the form of verbatim quotes from the interview process. This approach has been adopted for two reasons. First, it reflects the theoretical framework of grounded theory that accentuates the development of theory directly from the data that is collected. Second, the direct source of primary material often captured what might otherwise have taken paragraphs of notes to describe. In many instances, the quotation captured the essence of the insight. The language used along with the examples or analogies cited provided another dimension to the contribution being made. As a result, the presentation of findings utilises the use of quotations to illustrate the evidence that underpins the theoretical
development and highlight the components that directly contributed to the resulting theories. Further, this approach addresses the challenge in presenting qualitative research that includes both the ‘patterns’ or concepts that emerge as well as the ‘particulars’ or specific data that contribute to the pattern or overall finding (Perry 2002).

The data that is presented to support each finding is representative of a much wider body of data collected from this research. In each case, the data that is presented was considered to be the most salient to convey the learning that was devolved. In addition, the presented data often effectively reflected the broader view of the collective contributions.

To maintain the anonymity of the participants and the nature of their respective institution, all participants have been given a reference number and are referred to as “CE” regardless of whether they are a chief executive or vice-chancellor. In addition, the quotes are listed in order of perceived significance rather than in numerical order according to the reference number of the participants who are quoted.

Section 4.5 on pages 192-196 outlines an overall summary of the findings discussed in this section. This summary includes a table to link each of the listed conclusions to the relevant parts of the section.

4.4.2 Theme one: Motivation

In interviewing tertiary education sector leaders about preparation for collaboration, the discussion often started with dialogue on the motivation or reasons why institutions collaborate. This included exploring the analysis done by organisations at the preparatory phase to identify the rationale for entering collaborative activity.

This sub-section explores the wide range of factors that motivate organisations to participate in collaborative activity. As the section will detail, there are numerous elements and sub-elements that influence leaders and institutions to contemplate, plan and enter collaborative initiatives. From financial survival to aspiring to provide more effective pathways to future learning for a region’s students, tertiary leaders discussed the many factors that are considered at the early stages of collaboration. These discussions drew upon the leaders’
experiences of collaboration and involved a significant degree of reflection on the relationship between the initial motivation to enter collaborative activity and the corresponding success of that initiative.

From these discussions emerged six main reasons why tertiary education institutions seek to collaborate:

1. Shared benefit;
2. Organisational effectiveness and business viability;
3. Stakeholder benefit – students, region, staff;
4. Necessity – financial and/or regulatory pressure;
5. An alternative route to competition;
6. Altruism – contributing to the ‘greater good’.

These reasons or motivations are now discussed in turn.

4.4.2.1 Shared benefit

While the initial incentives to collaborate are numerous, shared benefit emerged from these discussions as the overriding reason why two or more tertiary education institutions seek to collaborate. Throughout the discussions on this theme, participants kept returning to the notion that their institution and the associated partnering organisations could both gain from working co-operatively together.

Because we see that if we work together we’ll build both our businesses (CE13).

Collaboration, co-operation, requires people to realise that both sides need to win. There needs to be a view that both sides are winning out of this. Now that doesn’t necessarily mean winning money, but there’s got to be seen to be benefit not only to the two institutions but also to the stakeholders, and now I mean the industry and individual stakeholders whom they serve (CE14).

I think probably mutual benefit is the one that’s the biggest driver (CE15).
By and large if you’re collaborating… you’re doing that with the expectation you’re trying to achieve some sort of shared objective (CE17).

An aspect of shared benefit that the participants articulated was the concept that by working collaboratively they could achieve more than they could by either working alone or utilising some other form of business model such as partnership or joint venture.

It’s people coming to terms with the fact that the collective whole, if they collaborate, can be bigger than the individual efforts that either of them make on their own (CE9).

… the willingness to work together to achieve something better together than we can achieve separately (CE10).

We can end up achieving more collaboratively than we could separately (CE8).

Collaboration is when both parties are actually putting something into it and both parties are getting something out of it. If I’m just paying another organisation to do some work I don’t see that as collaboration (CE16).

… firstly I guess is to ensure that it has an opportunity to achieve those things that its setting out to achieve and that in working with this other organisation that is going to enhance those prospects or its going to oil the wheels in a way that you can’t or it’s going to provide an element of input that you simply can’t provide (CE4).

A number of participants suggested that the potential for an existing relationship to develop into more formal collaborative activity was the motivation to expend time and energy with other tertiary institution leaders, often in a social setting. This reflects the notion that the most effective collaborations are those based on strong personal relationships, a concept that will be explored further in the next section. These discussions suggest that tertiary institution leaders often seek to seed collaboration with those peers that they personally get along with and who hold similar values and operating styles to their own.

Well, in the good example the beginnings were dinners, really. The odd dinner, what do you think about, is there something among us that we could build on. Social, no pressure.
Social occasions. Just get to know one another. But the kind of reason why you would have turned up for dinner was a basic concept that there might be something worthwhile in discussing collaboration. So not just collaboration for its own sake, but there might be something in this for me as a spur (CE15).

The research participants suggested a wide range of specific benefits that they sought to achieve from entering collaboration. These will be explored further in the next two subsections.

… there are a number of incentives it seems to me for co-operation to occur whether it’s within or between institutions (CE9).

4.4.2.2 Organisational effectiveness

A number of participants suggested that enhancing the overall effectiveness and business viability of the organisation was an important benefit to be gained from inter-institutional collaboration. From these discussions emerged the notion of collaboration as a means or tool to achieving organisational goals such as growth in student numbers, operational efficiency gains and enhanced support functions.

… we are only really interested in collaborating where it means we can be more effective (CE1).

… the collaboration must lead to a significant benefit to the institution. There has to be a solid benefit, it needs to be a commercial arrangement (CE2).

I think collaboration also – part of the limiting factor is around the economic viability, financial viability of individual institutions. But in fact, in the new environment that’s becoming a driver, because we’ve got to try and take more cost out of our institutions and if we can do that by co-operating and collaborating more, then I think that’s a much more powerful driver than simply having a government policy which says you will collaborate rather than compete (CE12).

As a CEO I always feel a responsibility to make sure that I’m looking at the sorts of
collaborations and partnerships that are going to be of greatest benefit to the institution (CE12).

You get to a point and you think if I’m going to grow I’m going to have to co-operate. If I’m going to renew I’m going to have to co-operate, If I’m going to refresh I’m going to have to co-operate. If I want to keep staff I’ve got to give them some new horizons (CE9).

4.4.2.3 Stakeholder benefit

One of the benefits suggested by a number of participants was the benefit to the organisation’s stakeholders, particularly the institution’s students and the region within which it is located. This was often articulated in terms of being able to provide a wider range of study programmes to local students, retaining students within the region and creating pathways for future study. Reducing duplication within the wider sector and allowing resources to be redirected for more effective use was also highlighted as a potential benefit.

I’m looking for a relationship that would add value to the service or the opportunities we can provide to our students and to our community. Our core business is about educating our students and our community and bringing opportunities for our community. And if it didn’t have that core characteristic, then it would be quite an unusual collaboration (CE8).

There’s got to be seen to be benefit, not only to the two institutions but also to the stakeholders and now I mean the industry and individual stakeholders whom they serve (CE1).

That you’re achieving something that’s core to your business. That it’s better for students, it’s better for staff, it’s better for industry, it’s better for your stakeholders that rather than doing something alone, you’ve been able to find a partner and build a relationship to achieve something better (CE15).

Providing developmental opportunities for an institution’s staff or supporting them in specific work initiatives was also identified by participants as a benefit to be gained from collaborative activity. This was of particular benefit for smaller organisations in linking academic or administrative staff with their peers in other organisations or providing the opportunity to work on initiatives the institution would not be able to undertake on its own. It
was also cited as an important benefit for staff working in science or research disciplines where collaboration could provide the opportunity for new discoveries and innovation to be made by staff working within and across scientific fields.

Potentially also partnerships that will add value to my staff, either from the professional development perspective, from the research perspective, from the good practice perspective (CE8).

The principle is learner outcome and [name of institution] institutional and staff benefit. That doesn’t mean that all the staff of [institution] have got to benefit. It may be that by improving the viability of [institution] and bringing added value to those staff who have nothing to do with provision at all (CE8).

…your scientist with a petri dish has an interest in a problem that he can’t solve by himself, and so he reaches out to people who can help, or whom he can help. That’s the felt need for global dialogue around research (CE7).

There’s lots of examples of science that has progressed because different disciplines have co-operated (CE9).

A few participants discussed the process of assessing the benefits against the potential cost or downsides of possible collaboration during the preparative phases. An element of this was the concept that collaboration should ‘do no harm’ to the institutions or communities involved, particularly in situations where there was a significant difference in the size of the participating organisations, for example where there was a larger, dominant player and a smaller organisation. A feature of these discussions was the acknowledgement by participants that the possible downsides or costs to collaborative activity were not often fully assessed or appreciated at the preparatory stage.

What I wouldn’t want us to do is to go into something which quite clearly is just about, just about dollars if that collaboration had a significant chance of also significantly upsetting people within the organisation, being detrimental to the community, probably ending up with reactions and responses that would cause us to have problems as a result (CE4).
Well, it’s the strength of the benefit that you’re going to get I think certainly influences whether you will stick with it and certainly influences how much energy you’ll put in to making it work (CE13).

This notion that it’s inherently a good think to be getting into collaboration. I mean, it isn’t inherently a good thing. It’s inherently a good thing to be nice to each other and get on well but it doesn’t necessarily mean you have to collaborate… You know, lots of good ideas are around but is it worth the expenditure of effort. Could it be achieved in other ways rather than through some sort of collaborative venture. There are sometimes other solutions that are simpler (CE17).

4.4.2.4 Necessity

Necessity was also identified by a number of participants as a key incentive to collaborate. Necessity was discussed in relation to the financial status of the organisation, and in recognition that in some cases the only way to advance a particular initiative was to access resources not available within the leader’s organisation.

And then arriving here when I commented that there was quite a lot of innovative thinking here about collaboration I was told that it’s somewhat easier when you’re standing on a burning platform (CE2).

It’s sometimes driven out of desperation, or necessity (CE9).

So co-operation comes about with individuals being willing to be team player, being willing to co-operate. It comes about often because necessity. They want to get something done, they can only do it by working with others, accessing other equipment, being part of a bigger team (CE9).

Necessity was also at times discussed in terms of regulation or due to external pressures. Participants cited that external pressures could come from within the wider community or region the institution operated within or from central government in the form of policy or funding requirements.
At the end of the day, you’re only going to collaborate for one of two things. You are going to collaborate because you can see an outcome for you or your organisation in it. You’re not going to do it for nothing. There has to be some sort of outcome. Or else you’re forced to do it. You’re forced to do it through regulation (CE16).

So whilst necessity is a term I used, it was also a belief I had that the necessity came from the point of view of I had a city that was growing, believed that it needed to, if you like, reinforce its growing status in the country by having a university (CE8).

4.4.2.5 Collaboration vs competition

Another aspect of necessity as a motivation to collaborate was articulated as an alternative option to competing with other tertiary sector institutions in response to the wider external operating environment. In general, participants expressed a preference for pursuing collaborative rather than competitive activities. This was largely due to participants recognising that the benefits to be gained from collaborative initiatives were likely to be greater than what could be achieved from taking a competitive approach. Further, the potential gains from collaboration were deemed to offset the potential risk of opening the organisation up to scrutiny from other institutions and sharing programmes and information.

So the options were a competitive presence or the ability to actually sit down and say well, look, we can complement each other here. We can end up achieving more collaboratively than we could separately (CE8).

I think instinctively I would choose a collaboration path before I chose a competition path (CE10).

In education generally, staff would prefer collaborative models than competitive ones (CE13).
Even in the highly competitive, dog eat dog, capitalist world there are large organisations who you think will be competitors who collaborate and work together on some things because they can see that there are benefits to them and they are always looking for some way in which their institution can have some sort of advantage. Not necessarily over another organisation, but with their customers, in the marketplace, and if you can save money, everyone’s interested in that (CE12).

More detailed discussion around the role of external incentives or influences is included in section 4.4.6.

4.4.2.6 Contributing to the ‘greater good’

Some participants articulated that the benefits of participating in collaborative activity didn’t necessarily need to be equal for both of the institutions involved. This was often expressed as contributing to the greater good of the sector and wider community, which was seen as sufficient motivation to participate. It also reflected the recognition by some participants that in some situations, effective collaboration required one or both of the participating institutions to be willing to ‘give something away’ during the process. This element is explored further in section 4.4.4.1 below, which discusses organisational attitude. An aspect of this concept was the notion of establishing a “goodwill bank” (CE5), where an institution may initially contribute disproportionately to a collaborative initiative with little or no immediate gains for themselves except for the prospect of potentially benefiting in the future. This notion of ‘paying it forward’ was mentioned by a number of participants as a feature of some of the initiatives from their collaborative experience.

The question of course becomes, you know it might not make you more effective, it might make the other partners more effective so how much do you say well okay, how do we become a part of that because it’s about the greater good of the sector (CE1).

It’s about your willing to share to help someone else’s outcomes (CE13).
And so it was because of a feeling of social responsibility that they were starting out very small and needed some help, and then now that relationship has grown so it’s been very genuine collaboration based on personal and also organisational values, similar values and cultures (CE15).

Yeah that’s a goodwill bank, that’s what’s good about that… because there is a material cost to them for what they’ve done for us in the [subject matter] example, and we’ve been very grateful, we’ve expressed that gratitude but yes the call will come, we will be a quid pro quo around that (CE5).

I’ve just observed it many times that people don’t appreciate that they are actually going to have to pay some prices. In a good relationship of any sort, you are expecting a net gain but you are going to have to give away at some point (CE17).

A few participants considered the ‘greater good’ approach or willingness to co-operate as being an underlying value set manifested by people working in the education sector.

I think because education, doesn’t matter whether it’s primary, secondary, tertiary, in its essence is a co-operative activity, and therefore it’s kind of in the nature of teachers and institutions which provides teaching and learning to be co-operative (CE12).

A few participants expressed their motivation to collaborate in wider aspirational terms. This was usually related to the benefits that could be gained for the sector as a whole and how these benefits could then translate into enhanced educational or vocational opportunities for learners and the potential flow on effect of this to the wider community.

I think we need to be aspiring to something… the real thing I’m aspiring to is showing the sector that it is possible for two organisations to together achieve a whole heap of things, for the students and for the stakeholders and in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness without merging…(CE17).
… every collaboration is launched in hope and against a promise this might be a good thing. And sometimes the promise isn’t real. Sometimes, you know, what you thought was a potential good collaboration when you put all the work in actually isn’t there. But in my mind I wouldn’t call that a failure because if you truly believed on the best evidence available that the hope, the promise of something good coming out of it was reasonable at the time you did it, then it was worth doing (CE3).

4.4.2.7 Summary

In summary, the motivation or reasons why tertiary education institutions enter collaboration are as numerous as they are varied. Discussion on this topic spanned a wide range of motivating factors, from responding to external influences such as regulatory requirements and financial pressure, to accessing resources and expertise to achieve organisational goals an institution would not usually be able to achieve on its own. While participants cited various motivations for seeking to work with other institutions, undertaking activities that provided mutual benefits to both organisations, and their associated stakeholders, emerged as the overriding reason to consider collaboration. The possibility of generating something significant for both institutions was deemed by participants to be a more motivating factor than undertaking activities that would solely benefit one organisation or taking a competitive approach to achieving a specific organisational goal.

4.4.3 Theme two – Institutional fit

After exploring the reasons why tertiary education institutions collaborate, the discussions then focused on how institutions go about selecting organisations to work with and the degree to which this is assessed during the preparatory phase.

The interview participants articulated a range of factors that influenced the choice of institutions they sought to collaborate with or shaped their thinking when approached about a collaborative opportunity.
From these discussions emerged seven main elements that leaders considered when contemplating potential collaborative partners:

1. Existing relationships – personal and institutional;
2. Trust;
3. Mutual interest;
4. Similar culture and values;
5. Similarity of organisation;
6. Geographic location;
7. Size.

These factors are explored further in this section. Discussions about influencing factors in determining the ‘institutional fit’ of potentially participating organisations included a range of ‘hard’ physical factors such as organisation size or geographic location along with a number of ‘soft’ value-based attributes such as trust and personal relationships.

From the wide ranging discussions on this topic emerged a broad diversity of views about the optimal attributes of potential collaborative partners. For example, for some participants close geographical proximity to another institution was an enabler to collaboration while for others it was a distinctive barrier. These discussions revealed the importance of considering who would make the optimal partner or partners for a specific collaborative initiative, particularly considering that the influencing factors will be different in each situation. Participants suggested that taking a ‘horses for courses’ approach is particularly appropriate in a collaborative setting where the key attributes for potential partners can differ depending on the nature of the initiative.

While it was identified that there was no generic ‘tick list’ of attributes for the ideal collaborative partner that could be applied in every situation, the overriding factors that emerged from the interviews were the presence of strong personal relationships between staff at leadership and/or other levels of the organisation that were based on mutual interest and trust. This notion is explored further in the next sub-section.
4.4.3.1 Personal relationships and trust

All participants highlighted the importance of personal relationships both to facilitate initial engagement between organisations and as a prerequisite for building trust among the participating individuals and institutions. These factors together with the underlying motivation of shared benefit and mutual interest were considered to provide the cornerstone to effective collaboration. Throughout the range of discussions exploring the ‘ingredients’ that influence collaborative success, participants kept returning to the theme of personal relationships and trust. These elements were continually mentioned as being critical at each stage of the collaborative process.

If there isn’t a personal contact, if there isn’t personal buy-in, we don’t usually take it any further (CE15).

And I guess if you were defining one thing about the difference between collaboration and anything else is the basis of trust (CE16).

That’s why I’m really kind of emphasising the importance of good relationships, because if you’ve got a level of comfort and trust and you’re able to talk well together things come out of nowhere really as good ideas (CE11).

Some of it is down to how I particularly get on with an ITP chief executive and for me, that’s really, really key, just as is a colleague coming along and saying, ‘look we’ve had this approach, there’s an opportunity, I believe you know these guys we’d been working with are good, we should have a look at it’ (CE4).

…good I think involves a certain level of chemistry…. People have to like one another and find something valuable about actually spending time talking together (CE11).

It’s a very human activity, collaboration (CE11).

The importance of strong relationships and trust was often linked to reasons why collaboration didn’t advance or collaborative initiatives failed. While other factors could influence collaborative success, for example, if a key individual left an institution, the lack of
trust or productive relationships was considered to be a major barrier to effective collaboration.

The truth is that you’ve got to trust the people that you’re collaborating with, and the relationship is absolutely crucial… No relationship. No collaboration. End of story (CE13).

There’s not a sufficient mutuality of interest so the precondition wasn’t strong enough, but equally the closeness of the working relationship isn’t there (CE13).

And to lose trust is pretty terminal. And if you’re talking about whole organisations, which is your premise, you lose that trust between two organisations it’s going to be bloody hard to rebuild it (CE9).

A number of participants highlighted that the relationship on which potential collaboration is first suggested or contemplated could be between staff at all levels of the organisation, not just leadership. In addition, a number of organisations actively encouraged staff to seek collaborative opportunities in their day-to-day dealings with their counterparts in other institutions or colleagues in the sector. This concept is explored further in section 4.4.4.2.

It’s a form of collaboration which where it’s the staff with the specific interests that get on and have that trust and shared vision… (CE4)

I think that actually most inter-university co-operations are scientist to scientist (CE7).

For example, finance managers get together because they’re finance managers. Because they have an interest in common as part of what their role is in their ITPs (CE12).

… the vast majority of people who are moved by a discipline like talking to other people in that discipline (CE3).
4.4.3.2 Similarity of culture and values

In terms of other important attributes, most participants articulated the need for similar cultures, values or operating styles when considering institutions to collaborate with. This was expressed as finding the right ‘fit’ with partner organisations. Participants suggested that similarity in culture and values could overcome other differences between institutions such as organisation size, proximity and nature, for example a large metropolitan university working with a provincial vocation-based polytechnic.

It comes back to that fundamental question: can you work with the organisation with its value set? Is it close enough to your’s? Is the programme area, programme activities close enough to what you’ve got, close enough to what you’re doing to make it viable to enter a collaborative arrangement where you’re not going to get swallowed up or they’re not going to get swallowed up… And if any of those arms is missing you haven’t got the fundamental basis for collaboration. It’s almost inconceivable that any organisation could collaborate effectively with another organisation that doesn’t have shared values, doesn’t recognise the mutual benefit they’re going to get out of it (CE16).

… a certain level of likeness in the sense that probably your big strategies, your big ideals or goals that you’re heading towards of a medium term basis need to be compatible. If you’re going in completely opposite directions, it’s not going to work (CE11).

We would always look to collaborate with people who we genuinely think that we can get along with a similar philosophy and approach to working within the sector (CE4).

At the strategic and values level there has to be a fit (CE2).

I believe that’s absolutely the only way collaboration can work. Certainly you come in behind and you put in the agreements that spell out who’s responsible for what. But if you ever have to go to those agreements you’re usually in trouble. And so my feeling is that if there isn’t personal and institutional similarities in terms of values and aspirations, that collaboration goes nowhere and in fact we never take it any further (CE15).
… if it is from another provider who is in a different part of the sector then you will find that requires a lot more time and a lot more effort to start to yield meaningful and sustainable benefits than if there’s a lot of commonality between the providers (CE7).

You can only work with people who have the same value set and same integrity as you have… There’s a number of CEOs that I simply wouldn’t want to enter into a collaborative deal with because I simply don’t trust them. I don’t like the way they work (CE16).

4.4.3.3 Geographic location

In addition to personal or value-based attributes, participants referred to other factors that contributed to their assessment of potential partners for collaboration. These included the geographical location of the institution, including its relative proximity to the participant’s organisation.

Participants had diverse views on the preferred location or proximity of a possible collaborative partner. Some participants articulated a preference to partner with an organisation in the same or neighbouring region. This was usually on the basis of having a shared focus on the students, stakeholders and wider community within that geographical area. It was also seen as a way of retaining students within the region by creating clearer and more co-ordinated pathways for future learning.

We really wanted a co-operative world and we thought the visions and the roles of our two institutions and the needs of greater [region] were so complementary… (CE3)

Our primary role is here, so this region and so we would always put provision, strategic alliances, collaboration and have a greater emphasis here (CE6).

I think geographical location is an important factor, because it does mean that if one is focusing on students and student pathways, then to a certain extent you may be able to negotiate the situation where the student does not have to move (CE8).
I suppose if you are doing a toolkit you’d have to look at other things like geography… and the pro of geography in this particular example was some degree of shared population and common interest (CE17).

A few participants saw collaboration as a way of managing competitive issues with institutions in the same or neighbouring locations. For these participants, having an agreement in place that defined the ‘boundaries’ around potentially competitive activities and instead encouraged information sharing and working co-operatively was considered to be beneficial to their institution and the learners and communities it served.

Good fences make for good neighbours (CE10).

A boundary to help avoid competitiveness (CE10).

Close proximity of collaborative partners was cited by one participant as being important in order to maintain a close working relationship, particularly when this involved staff at multiple levels of the organisations involved.

Well I think proximity is important because the relationship’s got to be more than an electronic one. You actually have to hang out. It can’t meet electronically. The relationship cannot just be a virtual one (CE2).

In contrast, a number of participants indicated their preference to collaborate with organisations that were not located in close proximity to their own institution. This was often due to the perceived sense of competition with institutions in their own or neighbouring regions and the risk of possibly losing students and/or funding as a result of working together. Working with institutions at a distance was considered to remove the sense of possible competition and enabled trust to be more easily built, resulting in greater sharing of information and learning programmes, and more productive working relationships.

And of course the down side (of geography) was that also they were competing organisations at a regional level so there were a number of reasons why people wouldn’t co-operate (CE17).
That large geographic distance actually helps you because you’re not competing against each other, you can work together (CE15).

So what the TEC perceived was an enabler, geographic location, all polytechnics, they had a qualification that was needed down here, we could work with them, it didn’t work. It was an arranged marriage that didn’t work in any, shape or form, so sometimes those things that look like enablers, geographic location, don’t actually overcome those other factors that stop you collaborating (CE15).

The metro group which I’m now part of is a great deal easier because there isn’t any competitive dimension to it really. The geographic benefits aren’t there at all (CE17).

If it’s over the hill and it’s in the same business and there is a level of competition it’s harder (CE11).

It was not an alliance based on geography which made it in some ways a bit more palatable (CE1).

Geography just happened to be the one that worked and I think probably same sort of organisation non-proximate is probably the easiest, followed by different sort of organisation proximate, followed by same sort next to each other is probably the hardest (CE17).

4.4.3.4 Size

Participants discussed other ‘physical’ factors such as the relative size of the institutions that were considered when selecting potential partners during the preparatory phase of collaboration. Participants had diverse views on the optimal comparative size of the institutions involved, that is, is it better to partner with a similar sized organisation, one that is larger or one that is smaller? As with other factors to be considered at the preparatory stage of collaboration size is a significant consideration, this will differ depending on the individual situation and the nature of any existing relationships with the partnering institution.

Size certainly comes into it (CE8).
I think similar nature and different size, you’re actually going to get someone gaining much more out of that collaboration than the other one. And so generally you’d find it’s a bit like when I want to play squash… I wanted to play squash with someone better than me all the time but of course the other individual wanted to play squash with someone better than him most of the time. So I think when you get quite unequal benefit stream… I think that actually tends to mitigate against that logical linkage (CE10).

One of the assumptions that was made when we were charged to increase our collaboration is that the bigger ITPs have a lot to offer us. And one of the things we found that they can’t offer us really is better quality in terms of their academic work and their academic developments (CE2).

**4.4.3.5 Summary**

On balance, most participants rated ‘soft’ or value-based attributes such as organisational culture as being more significant than ‘hard’ factors such as geography, size or similarity of institution when assessing the pros and cons of entering collaboration with potential partners. The nature of the existing relationship with a potential collaborative partner was in particular considered to be a more influencing factor than elements such as significant differences in size or geographical proximity. Participants stressed that factors that could be potential issues in a collaborative relationship, for example, the presence of a dominant player, were significantly offset if there was a strong existing relationship in place. From these discussions emerged the concept of institutions providing distinctive yet complementary roles in the collaborative process. That is, the importance of each individual player retaining its own identity rather than being subsumed by the other partners involved in the collaboration. This was considered to be a distinguishing feature of collaboration in comparison to other inter-institutional working arrangements such as joint ventures or mergers.

Proximity is nothing compared to (the) excitement of possibility that can come from personal contacts and personal relationships (CE15).

So just the fact that you can get on your bike and go and see somebody five minutes away isn’t itself a defining factor at all (CE11).
It is possible to have institutions from different parts of the sector having complementary roles… which can together produce a synergistic added value for the learner, and for the institutions and for their staff (CE8).

4.4.4 Theme three – Models for collaboration

A major focus for the interviews was on models that could be applied or toolkits that could be drawn on when preparing for successful collaboration. The purpose of this was to formulate theories on best practice on the ‘how to’ aspects of preparing and implementing collaborative initiatives. The main finding from these discussions was that there was no one model or generic toolkit that could be applied in every situation, in fact a number of participants articulated the need to be flexible in how best to structure and operationalise individual collaborative initiatives. This was discussed throughout the interviews, particularly as participants discussed examples and case studies of specific collaborative initiatives. These discussions highlighted the different ‘tools’ required or models to be applied depending on the type, nature and partner organisations involved in each individual case.

Everything is situational (CE3).

I guess the main ingredients behind a collaborative cake are always going to be roughly the same, what you end up doing is deciding for different sets of circumstances, is it going to be in some cases on a large scale is it going to be a Christmas cake or a birthday cake, or are you going to… use chocolate instead of raisins, and all those sort of thing… (CE4).

… the principle that you’re applying is fairly consistent. The model that you apply, how you achieve that, will actually vary (CE8).

… no one model is perfect (CE3).

In addition, from the interviews it emerged that there was no formal model or technical structure that participants drew upon when preparing for collaborative initiatives. Instead, participants appeared to draw upon their innate management experience and expertise in how to approach each situation along with the ‘learnings’ gained from previous collaborative
experience. In general, these learnings were more heavily weighted to ‘soft’ factors such as managing inter-institutional relationships and fostering the right internal culture for collaboration to thrive, rather than ‘hard’ factors such as project management methodologies and techniques. During the interviews, participants suggested a number of factors that leaders should consider in the preparatory phase to maximise the likelihood of success and mitigate potential issues or risks. These factors have been grouped into the following three main themes:

1. Organisational attitude;
2. Relationships;
3. Modes of operation.

These factors or ingredients into the collaborative ‘cake’ are discussed in turn in this next sub-section.

4.4.4.1 Factor one – Organisational attitude

An element that most participants raised during the interviews was the ‘attitude’ or pre-disposition of the organisation to collaborate. This was identified as being an essential ingredient in preparing for successful collaboration. It was also a vital factor in seeking like-minded organisations to partner with. Some participants indicated that this was an overriding way of doing business rather than being a specific business activity.

We see it as a standard part of our business; over 50 percent of our business is in partnerships and 50 percent is in traditional education (CE6).

I’d say it’s actually about having a pre-disposition to want to do that… And I think at an institutional level it’s the extent to which that might be a part of an organisational culture to foster collaboration (CE13).

I probably should just add that I believe that collaboration and partnership is the key way forward, of my institution being able to do more for its community and also hopefully nationally (CE8).
Being predisposed to collaboration was often discussed in terms of being open to new things or being willing to change in order to achieve organisational goals or respond to situational pressure. Some participants also suggested the willingness of institutions or leaders to ‘give something up’ or ‘give something away’ as an important element in fostering the best possible environment for collaboration to succeed. Others discussed this concept in terms of the institution allowing itself to be vulnerable by opening itself up to work with others and not being in a position of having total control over the outcome of this process.

It necessitated the polytechnic to a certain extent leaving itself a little bit vulnerable by being prepared to, through its actions, back up its belief about collaboration (CE8).

… an appetite for change…. And you might have to change in some ways that you don’t want to to achieve (CE17).

Well, I think it’s a willingness, it’s a felt need, it’s a conversational inquiry (CE10).

That you have to understand that what you’re doing is going through a change process. And you have to manage that change so people don’t retreat into their old comfort zones and not do that (CE9).

It’s the willingness to dialogue. It’s a willingness to accept new ideas, to accept new ways of doing things (CE16).

In a good relationship of any sort, you are expecting a net gain but you are going to have to give away at some point (CE17).

Participants discussed the need for staff at all levels of the organisation to understand the need or benefit of collaborating. This was to ensure the staff involved in implementing the initiative were supportive or at least understood the rationale for the activity in relation to the institution and is stakeholders. This reflected the need for the culture of openness to collaboration being embedded as much as possible throughout the organisation. Participants suggested that effective internal communication and involving staff in the decision-making process were ways of achieving this.
… you have to actually discuss this as widely as possible. Once you decide that this is a potential strategic direction I think you have to broaden out the consultations so that your staff at various levels, at senior management, at academic board and in the lecture theatre and in the workshops, that they are able to grasp why this is something they should be considering and also be able to take on board the perspective that they bring to such a challenge (CE8).

There has to be a very strong support at all levels of the organisations. Because collaboration doesn’t always come from senior management or chief executives. Quite often collaboration comes from two people getting together at a conference (CE16).

So you can have all the best tool kits you like in the cupboard but unless you’ve got those people out there talking to one another, agreeing on the synergies that they can achieve through co-operating, all the stuff in the cupboard doesn’t add to it a jot (CE9).

Well, the other thing I would say is that it’s not just about the chief executive. That in fact it’s about people within the organisation also having a similar openness of the same sort of personality. You know, quite a lot of our relationships and opportunities are forged through other staff who do these things. Who will come back and say “well look, I think we could do such and such (CE12).

Organisations that were involved in a number of collaborative initiatives in fact encouraged staff to suggest opportunities to collaborate. This was partly in recognition by participants that staff in the education sector regularly interact with peers in their discipline. Participants also acknowledged that staff working in particular areas were often best placed to identify how collaboration could contribute to enhancing existing programmes, activities and support services.

.. if the leaders, the chief executives, give their benediction to collaborations in institutions, it doesn’t make it happen, it unleashes the potential that already existed to happen (CE3).

I think that actually most inter-university co-operations are scientist to scientist. The executive leadership tends to turn up after the fact. Or indeed if an inter-institutional relationship is pioneered shall we say by two vice-chancellors meeting, there’s very little chance that it will succeed unless the scientists are already engaged (CE7).
I would think that for everybody they have that thought of is there an opportunity here…I’m just thinking through the senior management teams as it stands at that moment… and with the exception of some of the new members of the team…. they’ve all come up with ideas at some point on collaborating something (CE4).

And the language that kept coming back from my staff was it was permission to collaborate. They saw [collaboration agreement] as permission to collaborate… permission to stop competing and collaborate. And it was marvellous (CE10).

… empowering people. Just say look, you are a department head, a programme leader, a workshop supervisor, whatever it is, craft your own destiny. Figure out what you want to do with that workshop, that programme, that department… Industry liaison, other institution collaboration, new curriculum development, development of your staff, retention of skills… Go out and do this stuff. Here’s another opportunity and then the leader’s job is to get these people confident enough to say come to me when you’re ready (CE3).

A few participants articulated the challenges in getting some staff to see the benefits of collaborating. This was partly in relation to staff needing to share information or programmes as part of a collaborative agreement. It also reflected the need to shift internal attitudes or individual perspectives to being less protective and more open and willing to share and consider other ways of doing things. This was particularly apt in situations where staff in a particular discipline were required to ‘give something away’ as part of the collaborative agreement without seeing any immediate benefit for their particular area. Participants highlighted the importance in these situations of informing staff throughout the organisation of the downstream or wider benefits gained from initiatives so they could appreciate the opportunities and potential gains from the collaborative arrangement.

In my experience the biggest obstacle to really good, effective partnerships, is in the attitudes of people (CE12).

The difficulty is not under-estimating how you actually move the institution as opposed to say some senior management who believe in that or share a common belief, how you move the institutions to actually then have confidence to yield the benefits that are achievable (CE8).
That you have to understand that what you’re doing is going through a change process. And you have to manage that change so people don’t retreat into their old comfort zones and not do that (CE9).

So for example I’ll tell you a little story. This is an interesting one. The head of [discipline] came along to me one day and said “oh, one of the [collaborative alliance] partners wants our [curriculum] programme. Do I have to give it to them?” And I said “yeah, you do”. I said “that’s the deal”. And then this collaboration, all our IP is by virtue of this partnership is freely available to the others… So she sort of said “oh, okay. If I have to”. I said “Yeah you do. Give them whatever help they need”. And she did. And that was fine. And she was pretty unhappy about it. And then two or three months later I was able to say to her “oh, just by the way, I know you weren’t happy about that but do you realise we’ve now got a [subject] diploma that we were given”. And the truth is that you couldn’t stop whatever partner it was, [organisation], from doing [discipline]. They are entitled to do their own [discipline]. All that you did was help them do it quickly, cheaply. You enriched our partnership. The net result is they’re offering it possibly six months to a year sooner than they would have. We didn’t need to hold onto that (CE13).

The concept of being open and willing to adapt and change organisationally also extended into the form, direction and manner in which institutions implement collaboration. This suggested that at the preparatory phase organisations were best to take an open, almost organic approach to establishing collaborative activity rather than adopting a highly structured linear path. This concept is discussed further in section 4.4.4.3 on resourcing.

4.4.4.2 Factor two - Relationships

A key contributing element that most participants mentioned was the importance of strong relationships as the foundation for effective collaborative initiatives. As outlined in section 4.4.3.1 above, participants articulated that successful collaborative relationships were those built on trust and common values.

The open line principle of collaboration as I found it when I was driving it going forward is relationships between people (CE3).
I’m a great believer that collaboration opportunities are best met and outcomes best delivered if first of all there is an element of trust and respect between the senior people within the organisation who are working through that process and when I say that process I mean that process prior to collaboration (CE4).

That’s why I’m really kind of emphasising the importance of good relationships, because if you’ve got a level of comfort and trust and you’re able to talk well together, things come out of nowhere really as good ideas. And my guess is they probably could turn out to be the most productive in terms of making money or saving money (CE11).

A number of participants stressed that assessing whether their institution could work with potential partners was an important aspect of preparing for collaborative activity. This included consciously considering what type of institution might make the most effective collaborative partner. For example, would ‘chalk and cheese’ work better than two types of cheeses, that is, would a different size or type of institution be a better partner for a particular initiative compared to an institution that was of a similar size and nature.

Spend all your time getting to know whether these are people you want to do business with (CE13).

Pick where the collaboration simply isn’t possible (CE10).

You know, it’s just there’s some sort of form of alignment of the thinking. It’s often quite a good test. It’s like at the end of the day if they guy and the gal talk marriage and one of them is hesitating you’ve got yourself a problem of some sort (CE17).

I think there is an element of knowledge and experience and understanding that has to go along with that because you can … come up with some very weird and wonderful ideas about ways to collaborate with institution A and actually what we would be better off doing is collaborating with institution B because it fits (CE4).

A number of participants suggested that collaborative activities were often the result of tertiary education leaders meeting regularly on social basis. This extends the notion discussed earlier in the theme on Motivation that the possibility for collaborative opportunities to
emerge from these discussions was a motivating factor for tertiary leaders to meet up in the first place.

We were on the same wave length and we started dining together and hanging out together and realised our organisations had more in common than the rest of them (CE3).

The beginnings were dinners really; social, no pressure, just get to know one another… up for a dinner was a basic concept that there might be something worthwhile in discussing collaboration (CE11).

This concept was extended by other participants who considered that the most effective collaborations came from situations where the relationship was established before the institutions entered into joint activities. This reinforced the notion of strong relationships being a fundamental requirement for successful collaboration.

So I look at the collaborations that we’ve engaged in that have got traction and those that haven’t. Those that haven’t have been good ideas, mutuality of interest but not enough energy into the relationship. Those that have it’s been the relationship’s come first. And out of that there’s a mutual desire to further the relationship through collaboration (CE13).

So what would we do differently? We would probably spend more time up front and get the relationship to support the collaboration rather than the other way around (CE2).

See I wouldn’t unless there was a relationship there (CE14).

Another perspective on productive relationships was the concept that successful collaboration is more likely to occur when the relationship is seen as a conduit for a range of potential partnerships rather than for a specific partnership for a particular activity.

A willingness to invest in a relationships building without necessarily seeing what’s in it for you for a little while. You know, you’ve got to take the time just to relax and chat (CE11).

If you only go into a sort of relationship because you can see benefits for yourself and
you don’t bother about it unless you can, then you’ve sort of missing the point to a certain extent. That often it’s that relationship that comes first and then the benefits start to flow… (CE12).

Another element on this perspective was the concept that the stronger the relationship and the similarity of cultural values and operating styles between the institutions, the less important it was to have a specific defined outcome at the early stages of collaboration and the greater ability for an identified goal to evolve into something different. In addition, the combination of existing relationship and similarity of approach provides a stronger resilience to effectively address the inevitable issues and disputes that emerge along the collaborative path.

… at that point you have enough goodwill, inter-personal relationships and collaboration ongoing to enable an inter-institutional relationship to be built (CE12).

… good trust and good personal relationships (CE5).

... it’s been me personally that’s taken ownership of this set of relationships and I’ve used my personal contacts, people to get that trust (CE9).

There were a lot of good pre-existing relationships… relationships individuals had with other individuals (CE3).

A number of participants saw effective collaborative relationships as those that had a long term view and were not required to deliver results within a specified timeframe.

Because the other thing about collaboration for me is the fact that it needs to be an enduring relationship. It can’t be short term. It has to be long term (CE10).

I would say most contracts are time bound. The contract will cover from this period to that period. A collaborative arrangement is something you enter into and you hope’s going to be an enduring relationship which will change and evolve over time, but it’s not something you’re looking to finish (CE10).
A few participants suggested ways of building relationships between staff from the respective institutions. This included encouraging staff to meet with their peers to discuss opportunities for initiatives that could provide mutually beneficial gains, and co-locating staff working on a particular activity to foster closer working relationships.

And we worked best where there was a temporary office set up and we had all parties working out of one space. It diffused the mistrust. You got to know the people that you were dealing with a lot better, you got to understand that they were prepared to give a lot or give a little, as indeed they understood that you were too (CE9).

A few participants highlighted that collaborative initiatives with good productive relationships between leaders and staff often seeded further collaboration between the institutions involved. In this way, the culture of collaboration becomes self-perpetuating, further integrating it as a way of doing business within the organisation.

It worked so well, let’s do it all over again… and it’s very easy to do that because we had the connections, the people leading it had credibility and I think that was really important and there was a lot of trust that had built up (CE5).

I do see collaboration feeding collaboration, so you sort of have the experience, that experience is predominantly a good experience and therefore you look to collaborate again as a result of it with that partner (CE4).

…because trust builds and your knowledge of each other’s business builds and then you think of other ideas and then you just emulate the process (CE5).

4.4.4.3 Factor three – Modes of operation

The third main factor that contributed to possible models of collaboration was the way in which institutions prepared to undertake collaborative activity. Discussions about preparatory modes of collaboration covered a number of factors including:

1. Principles;
2. Resourcing;
3. Timing;
4. Communication;
5. Type.

Each of these factors will be discussed in turn in this sub-section.

**Principles**

Participants highlighted the importance of having principles in place at the early phase of collaboration. These principles were similar to establishing ‘rules’ or guidelines but were more focused on operating values and cultural norms than formal project management protocols. These principles included the importance of ensuring the collaborative activity did not undermine the existing activity of the institutions involved and also the concept of ‘doing no harm’ to the participants, a notion discussed earlier in section 4.4.2.6. It also included the principle of reciprocity and the willingness to contribute to the outcomes of the partnering institution.

Now there are some rules or principles… within that collaboration, one you didn’t have to share stuff that would undermine your own business activity to a degree … and one of the other principles was that you wouldn’t engage in activity that would undermine the partners’ activity as well (CE1).

We’ve established a couple of principles around collaboration… Firstly, that any collaboration must lead to a significant benefit to the institution. Secondly that any collaborative activity needs to be a commercial one… And thirdly no activity undertaken within any collaborative agreement should compromise the independence or autonomy of [institution name] (CE2).

I think we always take an approach to collaboration which is about being very fair and reasonable. I don’t think that we are sort of into the heavy handed approach with things I think we are very much an organisation that looks to try and ensure that both parties are getting the, have the best opportunity for an outcome that suits both parties (CE4).
I think collaboration as an educational concept requires a sort of a philosophical agreement where we work together without damage (CE10).

Principles also covered the way in which the participating institutions behave during collaboration. This included ensuring institutional behaviour was genuinely focused on collaborative rather than competitive outcomes. It also included operating on the basis of professional courtesy and integrity, often articulated by participants in relation to trust and respect.

Seek to find agreement. Don’t oppose (CE12).

It’s very much around having some basics, having some principles by which you operate within collaboration and I find it really difficult to always get away from those ones, trust and getting on with people, respecting what they do both as individuals (CE4).

Certainly a sign that says: ‘don’t jump to conclusions, whether negative or positive’ (CE11).

One aspect of establishing principles for collaboration is seeing it as being different from other types of collective activity such as partnerships, joint ventures and commercial contracts. Most interviews included a discussion about the participant’s views on the nature and focus of these different activities including dialogue on the unique aspects of collaboration and why collaboration was selected in comparison to other inter-institutional relationships.

I always think of collaboration as a slightly more in depth trusting kind of experience, co-operation is often based on mutual self-interest; it suits us to do so we’ll do it. Collaboration I think of more of a strategic process involving really working together on something from the beginning and sharing the benefits (CE5).

I don’t think for instance collaboration works in the business language of co-operation… which is competing sometimes and co-operating other times (CE10).
We’re in a joint venture where one party’s doing the work and a number of others have actually signed up and are funding it. For me that’s not collaboration. That’s a commercial deal (CE16).

In a contractual relationship the first thing you’re looking at is can I sue you for failure to complete the contract. Collaborative relationship it should be okay, well how did that happen, what can we learn form it, what can we do better next time. Because it also brings into thing that a contract is normally time bound. A contract will exist for some period of time. A true collaborative arrangement should be something that’s enduring and you’re looking to continue over time, not you’re looking to finish (CE10).

But if we merged we peel off some very unique components that make it beneficial to work with an associate or have a collaborative venture (CE6).

The interviews probed participants’ perspectives on the term ‘collaboration’, particularly whether they viewed this in a positive or negative light. While most participants viewed collaboration either neutrally or as a positive manifestation of productive inter-organisational relationships, one participant had a strong negative perception of the term.

I actually really hate the word collaboration, because it’s for me been so linked to that of forced false working together. I actually like much better partnerships, working in partnership with people, because that to me collaboration’s almost got that sort of Nazi Germany collaborators thing to me, and so I hate it. I just hate the word (CE15).

Participants provided a range of views on the level of formal agreements to ‘underwrite’ the principles on which a collaborative initiative is based. This is explored further in the next section on resourcing.

**Resourcing**

Another factor in developing a best practice approach to preparing for collaboration was how best to resource collaborative activity. This covered a number of elements including ensuring the staff involved had the adequate means and support to participate, actively suggest and/or implement collaboration. It also included ensuring that the staff involved gained some of the
benefits from the collaboration, such as travel to the partnering institution and recognition for the outcome of the initiative.

I think my observation over the years has been that people co-operate because the means by which they co-operate are made easier for them (CE0).

It’s really important to let the people that have the ideas get the resources to follow up on the ideas (CE15).

… you need a budget that will support that activity. I don’t think as a leader you can say to somebody I want you to take that group and that group and put them together and earn me $10m if you don’t put x% of that on the table in the first place to allow it to happen (CE9).

And so making sure that as well as saying you want people to be innovative and use initiative that you follow it up with the resourcing to allow them to be that. Because otherwise you’re not giving them the ability to be looking out for partners and relationships and collaboration and working with people to try and find other ways and better ways of doing things (CE14).

A number of participants also stressed the importance of ensuring there was internal collaboration within their organisation before looking to establish collaborative arrangements with other institutions. This reinforces the concept of ensuring an institution is pre-disposed to collaboration at as many levels as possible within the organisation to foster the best possible operating environment for collaboration to succeed.

Well, you’ve got to have internal collaboration. There’s no point in talking about it externally only and leaving it internal (CE13).

The problem with collaboration is actually its hard enough getting collaboration happening in your own institution so that the different divisions and faculties or sections are operating in an integrated way… (CE1).
As mentioned in section 4.4.4.1 above, a number of participants stressed the importance of ensuring that staff throughout the organisation were involved or ‘on board’ with the collaboration. This was seen as being critical to ensure the initiative could be effectively implemented.

So co-operation, collaboration has to be in-built into an institution (CE14).

In my experience the biggest obstacle to really good, effective partnerships, is in the attitudes of people (CE12).

An aspect of this was to minimise the risk of the collaboration being solely based on the leaders of the institutions involved. This was to avoid initiatives faltering when the leader of a partnering organisation left the institution.

It’s giving that empowerment to people who think of something innovative, that they actually can be the ones to follow up on it (CE15).

I think we are highly vulnerable in organisations to key people and when they move on, retire, change jobs then yeah, you lose that momentum, you lose that commitment (CE9).

… so it is an ethos around the whole senior management team, so it wouldn’t need to depend on just one person (CE5).

… is it’s not just about the chief executive. That in fact it’s about people within the organisation also having a similar openness of the same sort of personality (CE12).

An aspect of resourcing that a number of participants discussed was establishing systems and processes to support collaborative activity. This was seen as being an important element in effectively implementing collaborative initiatives.

It has evolved in that systems and processes and documents and agreements and templates of things have all been developed, so that people aren’t re-inventing the wheel every time … so build up a stable of processes and documentation that supports this (CE14).
Ideally we’d have had the systems in place at the front end rather than a lot of it grew as we went along (CE6).

So what would be in that (tool) kit? … Certainly very clear cut documents which relate to contracting. And when I say clear-cut I mean easy to understand, got all the boilerplate clauses is it, but have enough flexibility in them that they can be melded to whatever use you might want to put them to (CE9).

I do think that good, very good record keeping is extremely useful. It does enable, because people have different perceptions of what they said and other people said. And that record has to be trusted so that, you know, people need to feel that there’s a sufficient level of dispassion on the part of the person that took the notes (CE11).

In contrast, a few participants suggested that having established documentation and systems could be a constraining element to collaboration, instead suggesting that institutions are best to take a ‘light’ approach to this. This reflected the open, ‘organic’ adaptable qualities that some participants linked to successful collaboration.

Don’t put a contract on the table… wait until it’s come to something then we’ll reverse engineer the formal business structure if we need to (CE11).

If I then have a then sort of reaction that says ‘well you need to do a full cost benefit analysis on that’ otherwise we don’t proceed with it, contrast that with ‘that sounds like a really good idea… toss in a couple of thoughts about how it could be developed’ (CE12).

We’ve actually changed quite significantly the formalised approaches that were being used. It’s going from a very structured and formal MOU to something which is much more principle-based. So it’s moved away from a very detailed, operational thing to a very much more principled thing (CE16).

One participant highlighted the need for the institutions involved in a collaborative activity to be aligned about the level of formality and documentation required to support the initiative. Without this alignment there is a risk of the initiative not progressing further at the early stages or experiencing issues downstream.
He kept saying ‘let’s set up some structures here, let us set some processes, we should analyse it this way’. We were saying ‘no, that’s not what we want to do, that’s not how we want to work.’ And it was really interesting to watch that divorce (CE10).

From the varying contributions about the level of formality required to support a collaborative agreement emerged the concept of maintaining a degree of flexibility and openness at the initial stages as to the form and direction the initiative might take. For some participants this concept could be extended to the point where they were open to entering a collaborative situation without having a specified goal at the end of it. This was usually based on the strength of pre-existing relationships with the partnering institution(s), a concept that was discussed earlier in section 4.4.4.2.

**Timing**

Participants had a number of suggestions for the role of timing in effective preparation for collaboration. A number of participants discussed the importance of not trying to rush collaboration and expect results too early. This reflected the link between strong relationships and effective collaboration cited by most participants; the relationship timeframe was considered to be more important than the project timeframe. This suggested that any project management structure established to support the initiative needed to be cognisant of this and ensure any milestones reflected this approach. In addition, participants stressed the need for institutions to not get ‘carried away’ by sheer enthusiasm for the initiative. A number of participants considered collaboration to be similar to other major changes processes, which took time to plan, engender support for, and implement.

I think the key thing… which I would do again was not trying to take it too fast actually and allow people to sort of consult on it, think about it (CE1).

The most obvious don’t dos are don’t get carried away by the sheer enthusiasm that we can make this collaboration work and set up promises for deliverables that are simply too big too quickly. Because you will almost certainly find that it’s a little bit, you know, step at a time to increasingly engender numbers of staff in the partner institutions that this collaboration is not threatening, that yes it may be quite challenging and demanding, but it actually can yield benefit, and then slowly build on that (CE8).
And of course to build trust takes time (CE9).

And not be too impatient. I think trying to write the why we’re doing this on day one is really a mistake (CE11).

Other participants highlighted the need to maintain momentum to ensure a potential collaborative initiative got support throughout the organisation and did not get ‘off track’. This suggested not ‘biting off too much’, particularly at the initial stages of activity, to ensure the initiative got traction and was best placed to get some ‘runs on the board’ and deliver some early results.

It takes time… so therefore you have to have certain momentum in those conversations (CE11).

I think there’s a great danger when you do a lot of talking you start to get people on board and then you don’t deliver anything… you’ve really got to keep momentum going (CE8).

I wouldn’t change much of what I did. I’d love to have achieved it more quickly (CE8).

Communication

Effective communication was cited by most participants as an essential ingredient in the toolkit for successful preparation for collaboration. This included communication between and within the participating institutions to keep people informed and involved in the collaborative activity. Communication was seen as essential in highlighting the need for, and benefits of, collaboration and its fit with the organisation’s overall direction. It was also a powerful enabler in fostering the right environment, described earlier as organisational attitude, for collaboration to be able to seed and thrive. This was particularly in terms of encouraging staff throughout the organisation to be open to collaborative opportunities, and in empowering them to seek out, suggest and implement activities.

So I think the challenge is around effective communication (CE8).
I think you’d want some good communication processes because in my opinion when talking about organisation to organisation co-operation you’re dealing with teams of people. You might actually be dealing with hundreds of people in some cases. They need to know what’s going on, so you need effective communication (CE9).

I think we have to communicate more regularly and a much better quality communication than we’ve had (CE2).

I think the issue is communication back to your institutions (CE1).

**Type of activity**

Discussions associated with how best to prepare to collaborate involved discussions about the different types of collaborative activity. This included discussion about the relative merits of collaborating for new initiatives compared to working collaboratively to develop or enhance existing activities. Participants universally considered it easier to collaborate to establish new activities rather than to re-engineer existing initiatives. This was usually due to budgetary considerations and the challenges of introducing new activities within the constructs of existing programmes and operational infrastructure. This was often expressed as the opportunity to ‘start fresh’ rather than having to review and redesign existing courses and systems.

The more greenfield the collaborative venture is, the less threatening (CE9).

I think the new field, the greenfield is predominantly much easier… it’s easier to put plans close in place around new stuff obviously than try to integrate it into existing plans (CE1).

It was easier and it was new and it was interesting and there was new money. I mean one of the problems in ‘business as usual’ kind of negotiations always end up with saying: ‘well how are we going to pay for it?’ (CE5).
Another factor in the type of collaborative activities discussed was the difference between being involved in bi-lateral initiatives compared to collaborative agreements involving multiple organisations. Most participants considered bi-lateral arrangements to be easier to undertake than multi-lateral initiatives. This was largely due to the additional amount of time, energy and resources required to implement multi-lateral activities, and the additional degrees of complexity involved in working with more than one other organisation. As with other aspects of collaboration, the nature of any existing relationships between institutions was an influencing factor in this area, for example, a collaboration involving a number of institutions could be easier to initiate than one involving only two if the were strong existing relationships between the parties involved in the multi-lateral agreement compared to limited or fraught relationships between the institutions involved in the bi-lateral activity.

… without a doubt bi-laterals are a lost easier. We’ve had experience of a multi-lateral with the [group name] with… five ITPs. That probably will be buried in the next few months as a concept that had great validity but simply could not overcome some of the characteristics of trying to get a number of ITPs occupying the same ground in order to yield those benefits (CE8).

Well, bi-lateral relationships, partnerships, collaborations, whatever you like to call them are usually much easier to agree than the multi-party ones, because you’ve only got two parties. As soon as you add another party there’s kind of an exponential degree of difficulty emerges. Because you’ve got a wider range of people in the organisations with perhaps different agendas, different needs, different views about what they’re trying to achieve and what’s the best way of getting there. So my experience certainly that if you’re working with one other party it’s a lot easier to come to an agreement that satisfies you both (CE12).

It’s just much easier practically with bi-lateral arrangements. And then to expand bilateral arrangements. We’re realising that. Quite hard to set up a multi-lateral collaboration from day one (CE13).

In my experience collaborative arrangements work best on bi-lateral rather than multi-lateral arrangement. It’s you know, the old expression, two’s company, three’s a crowd (CE16).
How big can a collaboration be? How big can it grow without endangering itself, you’ve got to be sort of small and nimble enough to sort of do collaboration (CE1).

One participant discussed the issue of the optimal number of parties involved a multi-lateral collaborative arrangement. This was described in particularly evocative terms in two separate episodes within the interview. Both examples use elements of human relationships as the analogy and are particularly good examples of the raw source data effectively encapsulating insights from the participants’ direct experiences.

And I’ve often quoted in amusement or irritation that by saying it’s like marriage, you know, how many mistresses can you handle? (CE17).

My wife and I have often talked about how many people you should invite to a dinner party. It is true, you know, if you want it to go you need something like six or eight people. If you have 25, that actually can be counter-productive, or at least it’s not a dinner party, it turns into something else (CE17).

4.4.4.5 Summary

Discussions about possible best practice models for collaboration included dialogue about a range of contributing factors. While most participants considered there was no generic ‘bible’ on how best to approach or implement collaboration, they did suggest a number of elements that tertiary education institution leaders should think about at the preparatory stages to enhance the likelihood of success. In fact, one of the emerging theories from the participants’ contributions was the notion that the best thing a tertiary institution leader can do at the early phase of collaboration is to consider all of the contributing elements that can influence success to identify the most appropriate and effective way to prepare for and implement a specific collaborative initiative. As such, while participants were not able to individually or collectively identify a best practice toolkit for collaboration, the experiences and learnings they shared during the interviews have contributed to a series of guidelines that tertiary institution leaders could work through when contemplating collaboration. These guidelines along with other suggestions for best practice are outlined in Chapter 5 and included in appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. Other aspects on the role of leadership in collaborative activities are discussed in the next sub-section.
4.4.5 Theme four: Leadership

The role of leaders during the preparatory, and other, phases of collaboration was discussed at length during the interviews. Participants discussed the impact leaders can have on the factors discussed in previous segments of this section. That is, the influence leaders have on why their institution considers entering collaboration, who the institution then chooses to partner with, and how the collaboration is structured and undertaken. Most participants referred to the significant influence leaders have on the nature, style, implementation and success of collaborative ventures.

A number of participants discussed the influence that individual personalities have on how ‘open’ or predisposed their organisation is to entering a collaborative initiative. In fact, some participants provided examples of organisations that simply do not collaborate due to the style of the institutions’ leaders. These comments suggest that it is imperative that an institution’s leader is committed to collaboration in order for any individual initiative to succeed.

… if I hadn’t put it on the table, it wouldn’t have come up (CE1).

In terms of enablers and disenablers that one person having the one goal for heaven’s sake disabled all co-operation at all levels (CE3).

And you’re going to have people in organisations who are not going to enhance or encourage co-operation and as soon as they move out, the better chance you’ve got of succeeding… I think that’s why you see some organisations not co-operating for perhaps a decade and then suddenly you’ll see a merger. You think ‘what caused that?’ Then you realise that you had a change of the chairman of the board or change in the CEO (CE9).

… collaboration, co-operation, interaction, is very much driven at an individual level. It’s people, it’s individual people that make the running, and so that comes down to personalities… (CE9).
And they can change of course very dramatically with a change in chief executive. I am hearing for example that [institution] has gone through a remarkable transformation in only three months in attitude with an entirely open philosophy and the place has spun on, just like that (CE13).

Participants provided suggestions on how leaders can best prepare their institution for collaboration. This included fostering the appropriate organisational culture for collaboration to succeed. This concept of organisational attitude was explored earlier in section 4.4.4.1. Participants suggested that leaders have a major role in seeding and nurturing the notion of receptiveness to collaboration and role-modelling the behaviour required to maximise the possibility of collaborative success.

By ensuring your organisation has a culture of innovation, and a culture of humility, that they don’t think that everything they do is best so that they are looking out for things that are better (CE15).

One of the things you need to do is to … encourage people to have an external focus, and I think one of the ways of doing that is by creating a certain sense of safety within the organisation (CE12).

It’s about empowering people, about providing a safe environment for them to have both successes and failures (CE16).

As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that collaboration wasn’t solely dependent on the leaders of the organisations involved. Instead, participants suggested that leaders strive to involve staff at other layers of the organisation and that they encourage staff to seek and suggest opportunities for possible collaboration. This was seen as a key ingredient to collaborative success and as a way of mitigating the risk of collaboration stalling when a leader or other key individual left the organisation. It was also in recognition that people working in tertiary education sector often had existing relationships or ongoing dialogue with peers within their discipline in other organisations. In fact, encouraging staff to think and act collaboratively was often described as giving staff ‘permission’ to collaborate or allowing them to follow through on an innate desire to work with others in their field in a more formal and structured way.
A number of participants mentioned the importance of empowering people, as highlighted in some of the quotes listed above, to work in this way. An element of this was the need to provide the flexibility and support for staff to suggest and implement collaborative initiatives in the way that made most sense to them as ‘people on the ground’. This is an extension of the concept of ‘openness’ and willingness to change organisationally in an organic and almost vulnerable way that emerged as a reoccurring theme throughout the data analysis process.

I think we are highly vulnerable in organisations to key people and when they move on, retire, change jobs then yeah, you lose that momentum, you lose that commitment (CE). … and the reality is that institutions are people, so people change… and that is why it becomes sort of more about organisational culture and values (CE1).

In all my career as leadership roles in the tertiary sector any successes I’ve had have on the whole… come from saying yes to ideas people bring up to me (CE3).

… to say the chief exec is the only person that can ever sort of do collaboration certainly wouldn’t be the case here (CE4).

The risk that it’s not institutional collaboration, it’s two individuals and so you know, the bus accident scenario, how can you as the [organisation] manage that risk (CE5)

What you need to make sure is that although it might start with one person and another person you need to build that at several different layers through the organisation. So it shouldn’t ever hinge on two people, one from each organisation (CE15).

I mean the sustainability of that means it should be embedded if it’s serious enough in a number of procedures … so if the CEO goes it doesn’t all sort of vanish (CE17).

And the language that kept coming back from my staff was it was permission to collaborate. They saw [collaboration agreement] as permission to collaborate… permission to stop competing and collaborate. And it was marvellous (CE10)
… empowering people. Just say look, you are a department head, a programme leader, a workshop supervisor, whatever it is, craft your own destiny. Figure out what you want to do with that workshop, that programme, that department… Industry liaison, other institution collaboration, new curriculum development, development of your staff, retention of skills… Go out and do this stuff. Here’s another opportunity and then the leader’s job is to get these people confident enough to say come to me when you’re ready (CE3)

Participants discussed the role of leaders in determining and influencing other ingredients in the collaborative cake that have previously been outlined in this chapter. This includes the motivation or rationale for considering and entering collaborative activities. Participants’ contributions suggested that leaders have a significant part to play in strategically considering the role that collaboration could have in the future direction of their organisation. This could be as a means or technique for achieving specific organisational goals or more widely applied as a broader way of doing business.

The research also suggests that leaders have a responsibility to consider the relative cost/benefit of entering a collaborative initiative in line with these motivating influences. While collaboration is generally considered to be a positive activity, some participants suggested that each opportunity needed to be carefully considered on its own merits.

… I mean I probably led it from the beginning and it’s just the way in which I work (CE1).

… once you decide that this is a potential strategic direction… (CE8).

… well I think you’ve got to look at it strategically, about what the organisation, where’s the organisation is at and what it needs now and what it needs in 5 or 10 years’ time… and that’s I suppose when you’re looking at organisational relationships, organisational collaborations (CE12).
I think just saying collaboration for its own sake’s a good thing, go away, collaborate, is really hopeless. A, because nobody’s got the time. B, because as a chief executive my responsibility to my council is to do things that enhance the financial well-being of the organisation and the kind of shareholder, stakeholder value in it. And simply collaboration is actually expensive of time and money and of a lot of people’s time… (CE15).

you are going to collaborate because you can see an outcome for you or your organisation in it, you’re not going to do it for nothing. There has to be some sort of outcome (CE16).

So I am interested in the fact you are addressing what is essentially a key issue. There’s a general goodwill around the place, doesn’t mean you should rush around collaborating with everybody (CE17).

And almost by deciding that you’re not going to do what we were just talking about. Just because you’re getting on with a heap of people and everybody wants to do the nice thing it doesn’t necessarily mean that you should collaborate. You shouldn’t be criticised for not wanting to (CE17).

Participants also discussed the contribution that leaders can make in assessing potential collaborative partners. The various factors to be considered in determining the most apposite ‘institutional fit’ between collaborative parties is discussed in detail earlier in this chapter in section 4.4.3. This earlier commentary suggests that there are a number of things that leaders need to consider during the preparative stage in either identifying the most appropriate institutions to partner with or in assessing the pros and cons of potential partners that approach their institution with a collaborative opportunity. This includes considering the most suitable number of institutions to partner with for an initiative, the advantages and disadvantages associated with their relative location and size, and the varying complexities associated with whether the initiative was new or involved changes to existing programmes or support functions.
The data associated with these earlier discussions suggest that relationship-building skills is an essential component of any leader’s collaborative toolkit. It also suggests that leaders should be looking to their existing networks for opportunities to collaborate. This concept is extended further by some participants who cited fostering stronger working relationships as a key motivation to join specific collaborative groupings or alliances.

Philosophical approach to the way you manage the institution and the people within it, a view around the quality of the institution and the fact that if you are going into a collaboration then … the goals of the institution aren’t too far removed from our own and that you actually feel that there will be a benefit in a range of ways (CE4).

… personality and personal style that you could follow through and say well, people like this are probably better at forming these relationships and partnerships and therefore collaborations (CE12).

You’ve got to be prepared, if you’re going into this saying that you believe that we can be complementary to each other, distinctive but complementary, then you’ve got to acknowledge that this isn’t about your institution having an aspiration to be the equivalent of the other institution (CE8).

It comes back to that fundamental question: can you work with the organisation with its value set? Is it close enough to your’s? Is the programme area, programme activities close enough to what you’ve got, close enough to what you’re doing to make it viable to enter a collaborative arrangement where you’re not going to get swallowed up or they’re not going to get swallowed up… And if any of those arms is missing you haven’t got the fundamental basis for collaboration. It’s almost inconceivable that any organisation could collaborate effectively with another organisation that doesn’t have shared values, doesn’t recognise the mutual benefit they’re going to get out of it (CE16).

… that provides a natural avenue for people to want to actually develop networks and be part of networks that go beyond the boundaries of the institution to other institutions and to be able to grab and share best practice where they can (CE1).
The other thing from my point of view as a chief executive… was the professional development that occurs for you as a chief executive being able to engage with other chief executives in an open frank non game playing environment … within [name of alliance] … I did see that their CE’s were committed to talking open and frankly about anything and everything so it just gave a small group to sort of under a safe environment and quite a weird opportunity I think sometimes when you’re a chief executive to have those sort of things in place (CE1).

The data also suggests that leaders have an important role to play in ensuring their organisation is sufficiently structured and resourced to consider and implement collaborative opportunities. Factors associated with implementing collaboration, such as resources, are discussed in more detail in section 4.4.3 on modes of operation. These discussions suggest that leaders need to ensure there are the budgetary and people resources required to support any collaborative activities and that some form of administrative infrastructure is in place. This earlier commentary also suggests that any project management methodologies that are applied support the activity without unduly constraining the path that the initiative could take.

Other factors that were discussed earlier and that leaders need to be cognisant of include ensuring there is a balance between generating sufficient momentum to foster support and staff involvement in an initiative and accepting that like other change activities, a medium to long term timeframe is often required to implement collaborative initiatives. One aspect on the role of leadership suggested by participants was the importance of maintaining an open mind as to the nature, duration and contributors to institutional collaboration. This was considered to be important in assessing potential opportunities and identifying the most effective way of structuring and implementing individual initiatives. This was particularly relevant given the earlier finding that there was no one ideal model for operationalising collaboration, a notion discussed in section 4.4.4 above.

It’s about structure and it’s about intent (CE12).

Sometimes it’s opportune, sometimes it’s more structured (CE10).

Structure, control, yeah, constructed (CE13).
A lot of leadership is about intuitive timing, and I suppose, experience… I don’t necessarily think there is a particular order or timing (CE12).

Effective communication was highlighted by most participants as a vital tool for leaders in all aspects of the collaborative process. This includes fostering the desired organisational culture for collaboration to not only seed but thrive, raising awareness of the role of collaboration in terms of the wider organisational direction among key stakeholders, and encouraging staff to seek and suggest collaborative opportunities.

Communication was also seen as a way of sharing information about collaborative success as a way to illustrate the potential and actual benefits of working in partnership with other organisations. This included providing living examples of how staff can incorporate collaboration into their programme or functional area, often as an extension of the inter-institutional working relationships that are already in place. Further, communication was suggested as a way of building productive relationships with leaders in other institutions and with other stakeholder groups. It was also seen as a way of setting and managing expectations about timeframes, specific activities, and outcomes associated with individual collaborative initiatives.

…give the next people who are going to be involved a very frank briefing ahead of time, just to say look, at a strategic level this is where I think we might try and go, this is where we might not go. It’s really in your hands but see what you can do (CE11).

The whole of the senior management team knows what’s happening and why, they’ve all had input (CE5).

You have to actually discuss this as widely as possible. Once you decide that this is a potential strategic direction I think you have to broaden out the consultations so that your staff at various levels, at senior management, at academic board and in the lecture theatre and in the workshops, that they are able to grasp why this is something they should be considering and also be able to take on board the perspectives that they bring to such a challenge (CE8).
I mean, the alignment through the organisation, there’s a whole heap of stuff around communication… make sure it is reasonably clear on what you’re trying to do (CE17).

4.4.5.1 Summary

As this sub-section outlines, tertiary institution leaders have a significant influence on the effectiveness of any collaborative activities that their organisation undertakes. The findings from this section suggest that whether they are directly involved or not, leaders have a major part to play in the collaborative process. This includes determining the place of collaboration in the future direction of the organisation and ensuring staff at all levels of the institution are aware of this and how this relates to their programme or functional area. It also includes encouraging and empowering staff to identify, suggest and implement collaborative initiatives in line with the wider organisational strategy; providing the most appropriate operating structure and sufficient resources to support any activities that are undertaken; and ensuring effective communication processes and initiatives are in place.

Finally, as suggested in the previous section on Models for collaboration, leaders can do much to enhance the success of any collaborative activity by considering and consulting staff within the organisation about the many factors or ingredients in the collaborative cake at the preparatory stage and their relative importance in relation to the specific initiative being considered.

4.4.6 Theme five: Role of external agencies

A significant factor that was discussed during the interviews was the role that external agencies such as central funding or policy development organisations play in encouraging or incentivising collaboration. These discussions explored participants’ views on the way in which central agencies promote collaboration through funding inducements. It also probed their stance on central policy positions, in particular policy statements requiring institutions to collaborate in the delivery of programmes or development of new initiatives. While participants considered central funding to be an enabler to seeding collaborative activity, all participants considered that ‘enforced’ collaboration was ineffective. In contrast, participants stressed that meaningful collaboration can only take place where there is a genuine need or
benefit being addressed and where partners having willingly agreed to work together to achieve this rather than simply to appease an external influence.

I’ve never seen enforced collaboration working (CE10).

I don’t think you can pre-arrange marriages (CE6).

When they don’t have a mandate other than collaboration for its own sake, they don’t work very well (CE11).

So, for me the central agencies have done nothing if anything. They have devalued the concept a little, because the minute you try and … enforce it in, people resist (CE10).

And my experience of forced collaboration is that if there’s no willingness to collaborate it’s very difficult for the parties to do so (CE16).

Participants also considered that manufacturing incentives or dictating strict requirements, such as the number of partner institutions involved, to meet funding criteria to be a disenabler to meaningful collaboration. Participants suggested that this resulted in some institutions entering unproductive collaborative arrangements solely to receive funding. Participants also suggested that at times, this policy approach spurred heightened competition and in fact, resulted in organisations being more protective of their ‘patch’ and less inclined to co-operate. This suggests that central agencies need to carefully consider the potential outcome of specific policies as any policy can result in unintended consequences. It also suggests that these agencies need to think through the most effective way of achieving the desired behaviour from institutions in the sector.

… the word is that if you collaborate you’re much more likely to get funding (CE3).

… this comes back to this competitive and contestable funding environment. In some respects people have seen it as being not in their interests to co-operate because they lose funding (CE9).
I think if you’re too prescriptive around that, if you try and bring the parties together then that can cause problems (CE4).

I think they’ve gone from being meaningful to being window dressing to try and appease what was the policy of the day from the government… In the last five to eight years I’ve seen a lot of nonsense collaboration that’s collaboration for collaboration’s sake so it could be written into our applications to get extra funding so that it could be shown to be being collaborative (CE15).

…there is no doubt that money and the rules around how the money will be divided up has changed behaviour (CE5).

Well, they’re actually their requirements, they’re not actually incentives, they are stipulated requirements so that … you can’t put in a bid into this fund on your own… that’s actually a mandated requirement that’s an entry ticket, is find a partner (CE5).

The universities are incentivised, powerfully incentivised, to compete with one another…. You are rewarded if you are successful in competition which results in advantage over another institution, where that advantage may create damage in the other institution, which contravenes the public interest. Nevertheless, the reward is delivered (CE7).

I don’t think there is anything that central government… and that’s including making funding available for collaborative activities, because all you’re doing then is you’re encouraging greedy people to grab for money and they will put together stuff that they can as quickly as possible to get access to the money without necessarily it being enduring. Because the other thing about collaboration for me is the fact it needs to be an enduring relationship. It can’t be short term (CE16).

Participants questioned the assumptions on which tertiary education policy in relation to collaboration was based. This included discussion about the assumption that geographical proximity would be a natural incentive or enabler to co-operation, or that a particular number of partners were required for effective collaboration. These discussions suggest that there is little benefit in grouping institutions based on a simplistic notion of what seems to make sense on a map or on a whiteboard. This is partly due to the earlier finding that there is no one model that can be applied to collaborative initiatives; instead, each activity needs to be structured in a way that is most effective to meet the specific need or deliver the potential
opportunity (section 4.4.4.4 on Models for collaboration). It also reflects the difference between what may seem like a good idea in theory, and the reality of applying that good idea as an operational requirement. For example, while a larger number of participating institutions may provide the benefits of additional resources and leadership experience to draw on, most participants referred to the extra complexity and implementation challenges associated with collaborative initiatives involving large numbers of parties.

Throughout these discussions participants’ reinforced the notion discussed earlier, that collaborative groupings are best determined based on the strength of existing relationships rather than on other attributes such as similarity in size and type, or geographical proximity (section 4.4.3 on Institutional fit).

A couple of examples of come up recently and I know many other chief executives are in the same situation where they’ve put in an application for [name] funding for example and the TEC, say four partners, and the TEC come back to us, ‘yeah, we might fund it, but we like eight better, so do that’. And you say ‘no, we got four for a reason’. But they don’t ask the reason. They just say ‘make it eight because we like eight. It’s bigger than four (CE11).

The TEC stepped in and said, ‘no, you won’t collaborate with them, you will collaborate with [name] and [name] because they have [course] and they are in the South Island, and so you will work with them’. Now, we have a less than satisfactory relationship with either [name] or [name] because they perceive us to be I guess quite competitive and we’re too close to them. So what the TEC perceived was an enabler, geographic location… we could work with them, it didn’t work. It was an arranged marriage that didn’t work in any way, shape or form, and there’s still no [course] training down here because they had no desire to work with us… so sometimes the things that look like enablers, geographic location, don’t actually overcome those other factors that stop you collaborating (CE15).

…it wasn’t going to work because the nature of the groups that were put together were such that they weren’t natural conglomerations (CE3).

Writing in my investment plan that I must collaborate with [name] and [name] is dumb arse (CE10).
A number of participants provided examples where policy relating to collaboration was used as a ‘smoke screen’ to a pre-determined outcome such as merger or rationalisation of resources. During these discussions, participants conveyed a strong degree of frustration about the difference between the central agencies’ rhetoric of collaboration and the outcome of specific situations that resulted in institutions merging or closing without any apparent benefit to learners or communities within the affected area. These experiences contributed to some participants holding a cynical or suspicious view of central agencies, particularly the motive behind specific policies related to collaboration.

So there is a thought that this shared services collaboration is a smokescreen, for we know there are too many ITPs and PTEs and ITOs, the TEC quite clearly said that. However, you know, there’s no intention of forcing a merger or anything, but in fact their rhetoric is around moving people that way (CE14).

It’s okay, you know, government ministers coming out and saying we will now collaborate. Survival means that 350 staff here, if that collaboration means that I have to start laying staff off and some of my pathways are chopped off, it’s the wrong collaboration (CE8).

Now if we look at previous collaborations which became mergers and we just look at [organisation name] taking over [institution name]. There is now no sub-degree training that used to be delivered by [institution name] delivered in [region] by [organisation name]. So the students, the sector there has lost out. That was a forced merger (CE14).

Well, you can only collaborate if you have that meeting of minds, if you’ve got that shared mind set. And all the money in the world is not going to make that go away. What you’ve then done is a merger by proxy (CE16).

4.4.6.1 Summary

In summary, participants generally considered the current approach to institutional collaboration by central agencies to be unhelpful; hindering and, at times, preventing meaningful potential collaborative arrangements to progress and instead, resulting in “collaboration for collaboration’s sake” (CE15). These discussions suggested that the worse
thing that central agencies could do was to force collaboration in situations where a suitable precondition did not exist. During these discussions, participants reinforced the importance of genuine benefit and strong relationships as more powerful incentives to enter collaboration, than funding inducements or central policy.

If you’re prescriptive about networks of provision… I just do not believe that you are going to get the sort of go forward you would get if you had people coming together that actually wanted to work together and the reason they come together is because of a shared vision, need, desired outcome, values (CE4).

I refuse to engage in that, I’m simply not going to do that… so that meant I mandated to our team that we only engage in bonified partnerships (CE5).

I don’t think it’s worked at all, because I think if you look at where examples of collaboration is happening and it’s working well, it’s come because people have got together because they want to, because they can see that mutual benefit, rather than because they had to (CE16).

It’s absolutely counter-productive. You can only work with people who have the same value set and the same integrity as you have (CE16).

… they [TEC] think you can just do collaboration to the sector… And so there’s a rational level that says you can do that. The truth is that you’ve got to trust the people that you’re collaborating with, and the relationship is absolutely crucial (CE13).

The closest we’ve got to it is that what we’re doing turned out to align with the language of the central government of the day and the central agencies. We were able to exploit it for some funding. But make not mistake about it, everything we’ve done we would have done without them (CE10).

Participants had a number of suggestions of how central government and funding agencies could more effectively encourage productive and meaningful collaboration in the tertiary education sector. In general, these contributions suggested that central agencies could provide more flexibility in the way institutions choose to collaborate and allow the sector more freedom to determine the most optimal way collaboration could deliver the desired outcomes and results. Participants also suggested that central agencies are less prescriptive about the
nature, number, location and preferred partners for collaborative initiatives. A few participants acknowledged the challenges associated with introducing a ‘high trust, low compliance’ policy and funding regime to enhance collaboration within the sector.

I think there are things that central agencies could do to let the self-organising models flower, change, adapt and emerge (CE10).

The best possible thing central government can do is to keep well out of it and not try and force collaboration, but allow the system to self-evolve (CE16).

I think it’s about providing the raw ingredients, it comes back to our recipe again… and saying what we would like out of these ingredients is a cake that looks like this or a cake that could be used for celebrating Christmas or whatever it may be… describe the outcome, now guys let’s get on and see what happens (CE4).

I think by not having these perverse incentives of gosh, the longer the list you can write of how many people have been consulted and are collaborating in this, but by sometimes allowing it to be just genuine partnerships with one or two, two or three organisations. So not sort using it as a tick box… by allowing it to be a much more natural part of the process to achieve something (CE15).

I think it’s much better if those institutions see the need themselves at around about the same time and decide to work together. I think it would be much more powerful if we were like that (CE12).

The way you get collaboration is when there is funding incentives for collaboration, not for rhetoric around collaboration, and not funding which encourages proliferation (CE14).

So instead of this thinking that Centre knows best, Centre should be empowering those in the field that know best to be able to do what they do best (CE17).
At the end of the day the reality is that in today’s business world you are probably going to have to think seriously about how they can incentivise the right behaviour… it may be that you’ve got to accept that as an agency you are going to give some degree of if you like protection to certain parts of the institution in order for the institution as a whole to be willing to go further down the collaborative path (CE8).

So I’d like to think that, you know, there was a lot of talk earlier on in the current reforms about a high trust low accountability model, and I like the rhetoric, but how you get to that point I think is the challenge (CE12).

4.5 Summary of findings

The findings outlined above provide a unique insight into the perspective of leaders on institutional collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The contributions from their combined experience form the base of the initial findings that in themselves provide useful information for institutions considering how best to prepare for future collaborative initiatives. Collectively, the findings provide a rich source of information for theory building and practical guidelines that have the potential for application within the sector.

As with most human experiences, the most powerful learnings from the individual and combined experience of participants was in ‘hindsight’ as they reflected on their experiences of collaboration to date. The data collection process found that asking tertiary institution leaders for examples of collaborative failure was often more revealing than examples of successful initiatives. These discussions suggest that there is a significant gap between theory and practice in inter-institutional collaboration. Participants’ experiences indicate that cooperative activities that in theory should have had all the attributes to prosper can still be undermined by a number of influencing factors.

A major finding from the data collection and analysis process was the significant weighting given to ‘soft’ factors such as personal relationships and the importance of trust, compared to ‘hard’ factors such as similarity in institution size and type and geographic proximity in determining key ingredients for collaborative success. This finding suggests that while the rigours of cost-benefit analyses and preparation of business cases are important
collaborative preparation, consideration needs to be given to elements such as the degree to
which individual leaders get on and how receptive the participating institutions are to
collaboration at all levels of the organisation.

Now, having said that, again I don’t think you can, you know, you can’t make the sun
shine. You can put your deck chairs out, put sunscreen on, but at the end of the day will
the sun shine (CE11).

The relative importance of soft factors was evident in the content of the participants’
contributions and in the language used to convey their experiences and insights. Analogies
often used examples of human relationships or human factors to make a point, and case
studies from their experience regularly cited the influence of individual personalities on the
resulting success of the initiative.

But it’s a bit like dating. You know, there are some surprises, there’s from time to time
some awkwardness, there’s times of enjoyment and fun (CE2).

The strong influence of ‘soft’ factors was a key contributor to the finding that in general,
tertiary institution leaders found collaborative activities to be considerably more complex and
took a greater length of time to undertake than they had initially expected. This was partly
due to the need for relationships between the individuals involved in the activity to have time
to develop and for other defining influences, such as differences in organisational culture, to
be identified and addressed. Offsetting these challenges was the finding that the rewards of
effective collaboration could be far greater than the desired outcome of the specific initiative.
Participants’ contributions suggest that successful collaborative activities often seeded further
joint initiatives among the institutions involved, and could provide significant benefits to the
participating organisations, their staff, students, and associated communities.

The specific findings discussed in this chapter collectively provide a check list of
considerations for tertiary institution leaders to contemplate at the early stages of the
collaborative cycle. From the overall data and individual findings emerged some major
themes that were reviewed, reflected on, challenged and verified during the rigorous
grounded theory-based data analysis process.
The iterative process of sorting, grouping and analysing the findings culminated in the following summary of major findings:

1. Shared benefit and strong relationships are the most significant basis on which institutions enter collaboration. These factors were considered to be more important than other perceived enablers such as geographical proximity, similarity of organisation size or qualification for central funding.

2. Institutions are most likely to collaborate with other organisations where there are existing relationships that are based on shared values and trust.

3. To be an effective collaborative partner, institutions need to have an internal culture of co-operation and should be pre-disposed to inter-institutional collaboration at many levels of the organisation.

4. A pre-disposition to collaborate needs to be supported by a number of factors including: clear agreed principles on which the collaboration will be based; adequate resources to operationalise the initiative; effective communication between and within the participating organisations; and an appreciation of the amount of time that may be required to implement the initiative in the most optimal way.

5. Leaders have a major influence on the effectiveness of collaboration; however there must be support and participation from staff at as many layers of the organisation as possible for collaboration to thrive.

6. There is no one model for effective collaboration; however there are a number of factors that can be considered at the early stages to enhance the likelihood of success.

7. Bi-lateral collaborative arrangements are generally easier to implement than multi-laterals as the number of participants and degree of complexity is less.

8. Collaboration for new initiatives is generally easier to implement than co-operative arrangements for existing activities.

9. The existing approach of central agencies to collaboration in the tertiary education sector is considered by leaders in the field to be ineffective and unhelpful to encouraging meaningful inter-institutional collaboration. Tertiary sector leaders suggest that central agencies could be more flexible and less prescriptive about the attributes required to receive funding to support collaborative initiatives.
This summary represents the main conclusions that have been drawn from this study. These conclusions are explored in more detail in Chapter 5, both in relation to how they compare to the reviewed existing literature about collaboration within the tertiary education sector and as the basis for establishing guidelines for practical application within this field.

The following table illustrates the link between these conclusions and the contributing findings.

Table 4.1 Link between conclusions and contributing findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Contributing findings</th>
<th>Relevant section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shared benefit and strong relationships are the most significant basis</td>
<td>● Motivation</td>
<td>● 4.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on which institutions enter collaboration.</td>
<td>● Institutional fit</td>
<td>● 4.4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Models for collaboration</td>
<td>● 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Institutions are most likely to collaborate with other organisations</td>
<td>● Institutional fit</td>
<td>● 4.4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>where there are existing relationships that are based on shared values</td>
<td>● Models for collaboration</td>
<td>● 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and trust.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To be an effective collaborative partner, institutions need to have</td>
<td>● Models for collaboration</td>
<td>● 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an internal culture of co-operation.</td>
<td>● Leadership</td>
<td>● 4.4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A pre-disposition to collaborate needs to be supported by a number of</td>
<td>● Models for collaboration</td>
<td>● 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factors.</td>
<td>● Leadership</td>
<td>● 4.4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leaders have a major influence on the effectiveness of collaboration;</td>
<td>● Models for collaboration</td>
<td>● 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>however there must be support and participation from staff.</td>
<td>● Leadership</td>
<td>● 4.4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings that emerged from the data collection and analysis processes. While the previous chapter described the methodology utilised and the actions undertaken to perform these processes, this chapter focused on the resulting findings, trends and themes that materialised. The actual data in the form of verbatim quotes has been used at length in this chapter. This is in line with the theoretical framework and research methodology of grounded theory that was adopted for this research, which focuses on constant interaction with the collected data as the means to identify findings and content for theory building. The source data was also used to illustrate findings; in this way, readers of this study can see the data or ‘evidence’ that contributed to the resulting finding. In many cases, the verbatim quotes encapsulated discussions related to the finding ‘topic’ and made

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Contributing findings</th>
<th>Relevant section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. There is no one model for effective collaboration.</td>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>• 4.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional fit</td>
<td>• 4.4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Models for collaboration</td>
<td>• 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bi-lateral collaborative arrangements are generally easier to implement than multi-laterals.</td>
<td>• Models for collaboration</td>
<td>• 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Collaboration for new initiatives is generally easier to implement than co-operative arrangements for existing activities.</td>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>• 4.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Models for collaboration</td>
<td>• 4.4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The existing approach of central agencies to collaboration in the tertiary education sector is considered by leaders in the field to be ineffective and unhelpful to encouraging meaningful inter-institutional collaboration.</td>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>• 4.4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Role of external agencies</td>
<td>• 4.4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research
the point more effectively than a written summary of the individual and collective contributions relating to the subject area.

The data collection and analysis process for this study into inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector resulted in an abundant volume of informing data from which meaningful findings emerged that could form the basis of theories and useful recommendations for best practice. These results reinforced the benefits of the research methodology and data collection process that was selected, with tertiary education leaders openly sharing the broad range of their experiences of institutional collaboration. The interviews illuminated the depth and breadth of the collective personal experience that participants drew upon, in addition to their observations of collaborative activity within the wider sector and some of the external factors influencing the nature, volume and effectiveness of that activity.

The semi-structured interview style leant particularly well to obtaining contributions from leaders in an unconstrained and open manner. This added another dimension to the data collected with the choice of language, analogies and examples used contributing an additional layer of richness to the particular point being made, and in turn, finding being formed. Providing an environment where participants could contribute their views on a particular element of collaboration rather than obtaining their answer to a pre-set question also assisted in assessing the relative significance of particular factors, for example the relative importance of the size, proximity, organisation type and cultural values in institutions considering who best to partner with in collaborative initiative at the preparative stage.

The specific findings and groupings or themes that emerged from analysing these findings contributed to a series of conclusions from which theories and recommendations for best practice have been postulated. These are discussed in further detail in the next chapter along with an analysis of how these findings compare to the literature that was reviewed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on possible implications for methodology and possible considerations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines conclusions and implications resulting from this study into inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The chapter includes a discussion about the major themes that emerged from the research findings and the extent to which these themes have been explored in the literature that was reviewed for this study. The chapter also highlights the conclusions that have been drawn from these themes and the contribution these conclusions can make to the existing body of knowledge, particularly in terms of advancing best practice in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The delimitations associated with this study are discussed in the latter part of this chapter along with suggestions for possible areas for future research.

The chapter is made up of nine sections.

1. Background – the background section provides a brief overview of the research problem and the theoretical framework and methodology adopted to address this problem. It also provides a summary of the major findings from the study and the extent to which these findings have previously been addressed by the literature review that was discussed in Chapter 2.

2. Conclusions about research issues or propositions – this section discusses in more detail the major findings of the research within the context of previous research and summarises the contribution the study has made to the existing body of knowledge on the subject area of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

3. Conclusions about the research problem – conclusions about the research problem that were derived from this study are discussed in this part of the chapter. These conclusions are drawn from the contributing findings and major themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis processes.
4. Implications for theory – possible implications for the parent theory of inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector and associated subject areas are discussed in this section.

5. Implications for policy and practice – this section discusses practical implications from this research that can be considered and utilised by tertiary education institution leaders as well as central policy-making and funding agencies.

6. Limitations – the delimitations first introduced in section 1.7 of Chapter 1 are reviewed in this section along with a discussion about other limitations that emerged during the research process.

7. Implications for methodology – this section briefly reviews the research methodology that was utilised for this study.

8. Implications for future research – suggested opportunities for future research that could build on the findings of this study are discussed in this part of the chapter.

9. Conclusion – this section provides a conclusion to the research discussions and thesis document.

5.1.1 Background

The purpose of this study was to examine inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector to gain insights and new knowledge that could be practically applied to the sector to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives that are undertaken in the future.

The literature review for this study, discussed in Chapter 2, suggested a number of gaps in the current body of knowledge that contributed to the development of the research problem:

1. What is the experience of leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?
2. How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?

This study used grounded theory as the theoretical framework and research methodology for this study. The use of grounded theory is introduced in Chapter 1, and discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3. The findings that resulted from the grounded theory-based data collection and analysis processes are discussed in Chapter 4.

5.1.2 Contribution to body of knowledge

This study makes a number of contributions to the body of knowledge into inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. These are discussed in detail in the next two sections. The following table (explanatory detail can be found in Section 5.2 on pages 202 – 203) summarises the major conclusions discussed in chapter four and the degree to which the literature reviewed for this study reflected these findings.

Table 5.1 Major conclusions from the research and the degree to which these are addressed in the reviewed literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Degree to which the literature reviewed addresses the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shared benefit and strong relationships are the most significant reasons why institutions collaborate.</td>
<td>To a reasonable extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Institutions are most likely to collaborate with other organisations where there are existing relationships based on shared values and trust.</td>
<td>To a strong extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To be an effective collaborative partner institutions need to have an internal culture of co-operation and should be predisposed to inter-institutional collaboration.</td>
<td>To a limited extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Degree to which the literature reviewed addresses the theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A pre-disposition to collaborate needs to be supported by clear</td>
<td>To a reasonable extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principles, adequate resources, effective communication, and an</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appreciation of the time required for implementation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leaders have a major influence on collaborative success; however</td>
<td>Role of leaders: to a reasonable extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there must also be support and participation throughout the</td>
<td>Importance of participation throughout the organisation: to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation.</td>
<td>a limited extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There is no one model for collaboration, however there are a</td>
<td>To a strong extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of factors that will influence success.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bi-lateral collaborative arrangements are easier to implement</td>
<td>To a limited extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than multi-laterals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Collaboration for new initiatives is easier to implement than for</td>
<td>To a limited extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existing activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Existing approach of central agencies to foster effective</td>
<td>To a limited extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration is considered by tertiary education leaders to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ineffectve and unhelpful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research

The reviewed literature discusses, to varying degrees, a number of the themes that emerged from this study. The literature reviewed extensively examines possible models for collaboration and recognises the significant influence that leaders have on the outcome of the collaborative activities that their institutions embark on. There is also a substantial body of previous research that examines the motivation or reasons why institutions seek to enter collaborative activities. In addition to providing new insights into aspects of these themes, this research resulted in a number of findings and contributions that appeared to be in relatively new areas.
The concept of organisational attitude or pre-disposition to collaboration is a theme that is not extensively explored by the literature, nor is the concept that staff throughout the organisation can impact collaborative success. There is little previous research into the relative differences in implementing new collaborative initiatives in comparison to co-operative efforts focused on existing activities. There are also limited studies into the role and influence of central agencies on collaborative activity, particularly in the New Zealand context. Collectively, these new insights into previously explored themes as well as new areas of research provide a distinctive and potentially beneficial contribution to the body of knowledge about inter-institutional collaboration. Each of these themes is discussed in more detail in the next section.

5.2 Conclusions about research issues and propositions

This section discusses the major themes or conclusions that resulted from the findings of this research. Each of these themes is discussed in relation to the literature that was reviewed on the topic and wider subject area. The major conclusions that are discussed in this section relate to those that are listed in section 4.5, and are based on specific findings that are discussed in detail in various sections of Chapter 4. The following table illustrates the link between these conclusions and the contributing findings.

Table 5.2 Link between conclusions and contributing findings in Chapter 4 of thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Contributing findings</th>
<th>Relevant section of Chapter 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Motivation</td>
<td>• Motivation section</td>
<td>Pages 137-147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Institutional fit</td>
<td>• Institutional fit section</td>
<td>Pages 147-156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationships section</td>
<td>Pages 161-165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organisational attitude</td>
<td>• Models for collaboration section</td>
<td>Pages 156-176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Contributing factors</td>
<td>• Modes of operation section</td>
<td>Pages 165-176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leadership</td>
<td>• Models for collaboration section</td>
<td>Pages 156-176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership section</td>
<td>Pages 177-185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Models for collaboration</td>
<td>• Models for collaboration section</td>
<td>Pages 156-176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the major conclusions from this study is now discussed in turn.

5.2.1 Motivation – shared benefit and strong relationships are the most significant basis for institutions to enter collaboration.

A major finding from this research confirmed that mutual benefit was the strongest motivation for institutions to consider and seek to collaborate. While participants discussed a wide range of potential reasons to enter collaboration, the possibility of achieving significant gains for all of the participating institutions was continually referred to by participants as the predominant reason to undertake a co-operative agreement with one or more organisations. This, along with the presence of strong existing relationships, was considered to be more important than other perceived enablers to collaboration such as geographical proximity, similarity of organisation size or qualification for central funding.

The motivation or basis for collaboration was discussed in the literature reviewed for this study. Previous research into the underlying reasons for collaboration included Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000) who identified categories that described institutional motivation to collaborate. These categories of: evangelism, pragmatism, market imperative and synergy, reflect some of the motivating factors discussed by participants in this study. Other previous studies suggest that collaboration does not tend to advance without incentives from central agencies (Mahoney 1990) and that facilitating improved learning opportunities can be a strong motivator for some institutions to work together (Parkyn 1999). There were a number of authors that identified shared benefit or shared problems as a motivating influencer to enter collaboration, including Silverman (1995), Kanter (1994), and Henderson (1990). Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Contributing findings</th>
<th>Relevant section of Chapter 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Types – bi-lateral versus multi-lateral</td>
<td>• Modes for collaboration section</td>
<td>Pages 174-176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Types – new versus existing activities</td>
<td>• Modes for collaboration section</td>
<td>Pages 174-176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Role of external agencies</td>
<td>• External agencies section</td>
<td>Pages 185-192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research
authors considered the impact of the wider economic operating environment and market forces as reasons why institutions consider and undertake collaboration (Geiger 1996; Martin & Samels 1993-94).

The literature reviewed for this research did not identify a single overriding factor that motivates institutions to work collaboratively. Further, the previous research that was reviewed was based largely on analytical case studies of inter-institutional collaboration (Daigle & Robinson 2000; Fenwick 2006; Kyvik 2002). In contrast, this study sought to gain the views and draw on the direct personal experience of leaders in the New Zealand tertiary institution sector, who might or might not have undertaken collaborative inter-institutional activity. From these discussions, shared benefit and strong relationships clearly emerged as the dominating factors influencing institutional motivation to collaborate. Also resulting from these discussions was the concept that having a clear, defined motivation to enter collaboration was an influencing factor in the resulting success of the collaborative initiative. The importance of understanding the motivation behind collaboration was not as apparent in the reviewed literature. Instead, the reviewed literature put more emphasis on examining different models for collaboration to identify the most apposite structure and technique for operationalising collaborative activity.

5.2.2 Institutional fit – institutions are most likely to collaborate with other organisations where there are existing relationships that are based on shared values and trust.

A major focus for this study was on the attributes that institutions look for in collaborative partners to identify key criteria that could be useful for tertiary institution leaders to consider at the early stages of future collaborative initiatives. This is a topic that is also investigated at length in the reviewed literature, usually in terms of why collaborative initiatives did not succeed. Previous research includes an assessment of institutional relationships by Breuder (1996) that identified three main influencers to the strength of relationships: strategic purpose, relationship ‘warmth’, and intensity, and Rowley (1997) who highlighted the importance of compatibility between the participating parties. Other relevant studies include an investigation into relationship aspects related to collaborative failure by Kuh and Robinson (1995), which identified lack of trust, alignment and willingness to change; different ways of doing business; and insufficient recognition of the influence of ‘soft’ factors such as common
values; as key reasons why inter-institutional co-operative activity does not succeed. Differences in internal culture were identified by Mahoney (1990) as a barrier to collaborative success.

The findings of this research related to institutional fit reinforce the themes that emerged from the literature review. These findings highlighted the importance of soft, value-based factors in selecting collaborative partners, particularly shared values and trust. Further, this research found that the presence of strong, existing relationships could offset other factors that could potentially undermine collaborative success such as number of partner institutions, complexity of activities, and differences in the size and nature of the participating institutions.

5.2.3 Organisational attitude – to be an effective collaborative partner, institutions need to have an internal culture of co-operation and should be pre-disposed to inter-institutional collaboration at many levels of the organisation.

One of the major findings of this study was the importance of institutions being predisposed to collaboration at as many levels of the organisation as possible before entering collaborative activity. This is an aspect of inter-institutional collaboration that was examined to a limited extent in the reviewed literature. This theme reflects the related findings that the commitment of leaders to collaboration is essential for any collaborative activity to be successful, and that effective collaboration can not rely solely on the involvement by leaders; it must be actively supported by staff throughout the organisation. Further, contributions from participants suggested that to be effective, institutions should ideally have a culture of internal collaboration before undertaking external collaborative activities and should positively encourage staff to seek, identify and suggest opportunities for collaboration in their day-to-day operations.

The notions of pre-disposition and fostering an organisational culture that is open to collaboration were discussed to a limited extent in the reviewed literature that focused on tertiary institutional collaboration (Daigle & Robinson 2000); it was more frequently examined in literature related to generic institutional collaboration (Adler, Heckscher & Prusak 2011).
5.2.4 Contributing factors – a pre-disposition to collaborate needs to be supported by a number of factors including clear agreed principles, adequate resources, effective communication and realistic timeframes.

Identifying attributes for effective collaborative activity was a prime focus for this study and is a topic that has been widely covered in previous research. The findings of this research is largely in-line with the reviewed literature, reflecting aspects covered by authors such as: Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000), Kezar (2005), Harman (2000), and Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998). Both the participants in this study and previous researchers offered a range of checklists and possible models to enhance the likelihood of collaborative success. A fresh approach provided by this research is that the list of leading contributing factors emerged from discussions based on the personal experiences of leaders involved directly in collaborative activity rather than from observations of academic commentators. In this way, the contributions from this research are based on the reality of collaborative experience rather than on theories based on studies of institutional collaboration. This approach places greater emphasis on the practical applicability of these factors and the influence they can have on enhancing collaborative activity within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

5.2.5 Leadership – leaders have a major influence on the effectiveness of collaboration; however there must be support from staff throughout the institution for collaboration to thrive.

The role of leaders in inter-institutional collaboration was frequently discussed by the participants during the data collection phase of this study. It is also a topic that has been covered in the reviewed literature. Both this study and previous research such as that by Winkler (2006) and Vangen (2003) acknowledge the significant influence that the individual personalities of leaders can have on collaborative activities, and how these factors need to be considered when contemplating, planning and implementing co-operative initiatives. This study further develops this concept by suggesting that individual personalities can present a barrier to collaboration taking place altogether; either because of their personal attitude to collaboration, for example preferring a competitive to a collaborative path, or because other leaders choose not to enter collaborative initiatives with them: “There’s a number of CEOs
that I simply wouldn’t want to enter into a collaborative deal with because I simply don’t trust them. I don’t like the way they work” (CE16).

Previous reviewed research into the role of leaders in collaboration also tended to focus on how leaders can maximise the likelihood of collaborative success. Authors such as Daigle and Robinson (2000) provided suggestions on best practice approaches for leaders in initiating and maintaining momentum for collaborative initiatives. This research also provided insights into the ways in which leaders can enhance the effectiveness of any collaborative activity undertaken by their institution. A number of the suggestions by participants in this study mirror factors covered in the reviewed literature such as ensuring sufficient priority is given to collaborative activities within the organisation (Kezar 2005) and the importance of effective communication, factors previously suggested by Daigle and Robinson (2000), Ramsbottom and Baus (1999), and Thomas and Woodrow (2002).

This research provides perspectives on the role of leaders that were not extensively covered in the literature reviewed for this study. First, this research suggests that one of the most important things a leader needs to do is to ensure their institution is ‘open’ or pre-disposed to collaboration at as many levels as possible, a notion discussed above in section 5.2.2. This includes ensuring staff are aware of and understand the role of collaboration in the wider organisational direction and the benefits collaborative activities can provide. It also includes ensuring staff are empowered to suggest, initiate and implement opportunities for collaboration with their peers in other institutions and with other organisations they interact with. The research also suggests that without this support at other levels of the organisation, collaborative activities will take longer and be more difficult to effectively implement. The importance of fostering the optimal ‘organisational attitude’ for collaboration to thrive at the preparatory stages is a major contribution to the existing body of knowledge from this research. This is a concept that has been investigated to a limited extent in the reviewed literature (Burkhardt 1994), and appears to be more of an emerging theme in discussion about wider institutional management (Benkler 2011; Ibarra & Hansen 2011).

Another major contribution from this study is the notion that leaders should think through all of the varying factors that can influence collaborative success at the preparatory stage when either initiating a collaborative activity or evaluating a potential opportunity suggested by
Another institution or collaborative network. This is a concept that is discussed further in section 5.2.6 below. In addition, there are a number of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ elements that leaders need to ensure are available and in place to support any collaborative activity, a notion discussed further in the next section. These findings collectively suggest that while in theory collaboration is widely considered to be a positive activity, the reality of it must be supported by the organisation as a whole in both cultural and practical terms.

5.2.6 Models for collaboration – there is no one foolproof model for effective collaboration; however there are a number of factors that can be considered at the early stages to enhance the likelihood of success.

A key finding from this study is the notion that there is no one model for collaboration that can guarantee success in every situation, a concept that was reflected in a number of previous studies, in particular by Short and Stein (2001) and Robinson, Hewitt and Harriss (2000). This notion was also described by Thomas and Woodrow (2002) as: “Nor of course is collaboration a thing at all, but many different things, often bearing little resemblance to each other” (Thomas & Woodrow 2002, p. 5). Instead, as in previous studies, this research identifies a number of factors that need to be considered at the early stages of the collaborative journey. An overriding finding from this study is the concept of consciously thinking through all of these various factors at the early stages, something that a number of the participants in this study recognised in hindsight as an important learning from their experiences. One participant suggested that:

… you have to actually discuss this as widely as possible. Once you decide that this is a potential strategic direction I think you have to broaden out the consultations so that your staff at various levels, at senior management, at academic board and in the lecture theatre and in the workshops, that they are able to grasp why this is something they should be considering and also be able to take on board the perspective that they bring to such a challenge (CE8).

The recognition that there is no one sure-fire way of approaching or implementing collaboration makes the process of considering all of the potential influencing factors a particularly significant first step in maximising the likelihood of eventual success.
As outlined in section 5.2.5 above, the new contribution to the body of knowledge on this aspect of inter-institutional collaboration is that these contributing factors are derived from the direct personal experiences of leaders based on their dealings ‘in the field’. In addition, this study makes a number of distinct contributions about best practice models for collaboration which are discussed in sections 5.3 and 5.4 below.

5.2.7 **Collaboration types – participants.** Bi-lateral collaborative arrangements are generally easier to implement than multi-lateral initiatives.

Discussions about factors influencing inter-institutional collaboration for this study encompassed some assessment of the differing types of collaboration, including the relative benefits and drawbacks of initiatives involving two institutions compared to a number of institutions. This is an aspect of collaboration that has not been extensively examined in previous research, providing another element to the range of factors that tertiary institution leaders need to consider at the early stages of collaboration. The overriding view of participants in this study is that it is generally easier to undertake bi-lateral collaborative initiatives than activities involving a number of different institutions. This is due to the extra time and resources required to co-ordinate and manage the involvement of each additional participating organisation. It is also due to the added complexity associated with working with multiple different organisational styles, cultures and operating structures to undertake co-operate activities. This finding reflects another aspect of the gap between theory and reality in inter-institutional collaboration. While the concept of multi-lateral collaboration suggests there are benefits to be gained from combining the collective experience and resources of a number of institutions, the reality of co-ordinating and gaining consensus among multiple different organisations is fraught with issues and challenges.

5.2.8 **Collaboration types – new versus existing initiatives.** Collaboration for new initiatives is generally easier to implement than co-operative arrangements for existing activities.

Another aspect of ‘types’ of collaboration that emerged from this study is the finding that in general, it is easier to implement new collaborative initiatives than for collaboration to apply to existing activities. This is usually due to the ability to ‘start fresh’ with an initiative, including setting objectives, agreeing resource allocation and developing the supporting
infrastructure compared to working to adjust existing structures, agreeing how costs will be shared and changing existing staffing arrangements.

As discussed in section 5.2.6 above, this aspect of collaboration is at times implicit in previous research (Mahoney 1990; Martin & Samels 1993-94); however, it was not explicitly discussed in the literature that was reviewed. In addition, the existing research that was reviewed largely focused on mergers and amalgamations in the tertiary education sector, which involve changes to existing activities on an organisational scale. The focus for this research was on collaborative initiatives between institutions that did not involve the loss of identity of any organisation and that did not involve significant changes in governance. As a result, the scope for this study involved collaboration for new as well as existing activities, allowing comparisons between the different types of initiatives to be made.

5.2.9 Role of central agencies – the existing approach of central agencies is largely considered by tertiary education leaders to be ineffective in encouraging meaningful collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

The role of central agencies in collaboration in the tertiary education sector is a topic that was discussed extensively by participants. This is particularly pertinent given the environmental context of the current government policy, which actively incentivises collaboration in the sector with the aim of achieving efficiency gains and reducing overall expenditure (Ministry of Education 2002, 2004; Tertiary Education Commission 2008). There is little previous research into the relationship between central government policy and tertiary education sector collaboration in the New Zealand context. Given this, the findings of this research provide a significant contribution to the body of knowledge within this setting and are of considerable relevance to leaders of New Zealand tertiary education institutions.

The role and influence of central agencies was discussed in the reviewed literature in the context of other countries, particularly the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and some European countries. These discussions encompassed the impact of forced collaboration (Martin 1996), including the unintended consequences that can result from imposing collaborative activity on tertiary institutions (Abbott 1996). The reviewed literature also examined the role of central agencies as a motivating influence to collaborate; this
included Mahoney’s (1990) view that collaboration did not tend to advance unless incentivised by government policy. It also included Kezar (2005), who discussed the significant influence central agencies can have in both a potential and negative sense.

The participants in this study generally considered current government policy and the approach of central funding agencies to be ineffective and unhelpful in encouraging meaningful collaboration within the sector. Instead, this research suggests that current policy and funding approaches result in some institutions initiating collaborative activities solely with the purpose of gaining additional resources, or in others taking a competitive path to obtain a greater share of limited funding. Further, the study found that current funding requirements were inflexible and made assumptions about the appropriate number of institutions required for collaboration and the preferred location of partnering institutions, at times in a unilateral and seemingly arbitrary manner.

All participants considered enforced collaboration to be unproductive, suggesting that meaningful collaboration can only take place where there is a willingness by all of the participating parties to be involved and where it is initiated to achieve a specific outcome or address a particular need or opportunity. The participants in this study suggested that central agencies could provide more flexibility in the way institutions choose to collaborate and be less prescriptive about the nature, number, location and preferred partners for collaborative initiatives. Participants suggested that central agencies would be better to determine the desired outcome to be achieved by collaboration within the sector and then allow the institutions within the sector to have more input about how this is delivered. The significant challenges of providing a funding system that supports this ‘high trust, low compliance’ approach was acknowledged by most participants.

5.2.10 **Summary**

In summary, this research addresses a number of gaps in the reviewed literature about inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. In addition to the conclusions about the research issues, the study makes a number of conclusions about the research problem which are discussed in detail in the next section.
5.3 The research problem: some conclusions

This section discusses conclusions about the research problem that resulted from this study. These conclusions are based on further analysis of the major research findings listed above in section 5.2 and from the collective individual findings from this study. These conclusions seek to address the research problem of:

1. **What is the experience of leaders in the tertiary education sector in preparing for and undertaking inter-institutional collaborative activity?**
2. **How can the learnings from these experiences be applied as best practice to the sector as a whole?**

The following is a summary of these major conclusions:

1. Collaboration is generally considered to be a positive activity; however it is challenging and resource-intensive to initiate and implement. As a result, tertiary education institutions need to carefully consider why, when, how and with who they choose to collaborate.
2. The main ingredients for successful collaboration include a number of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ factors; however, ‘soft’ factors are generally the most essential elements, contributing to the complex nature of most collaborative activity.
3. Collaboration is ‘all about the relationship’, which is often why collaboration is so challenging, time consuming and complicated to implement.
4. One of the most important things a leader can do to assist effective collaboration is to stop and consider all the potential factors at the preparatory phase.
5. Effective collaboration requires a ‘whole of organisation’ approach; leaders need to ensure their institution is organisationally ready before embarking on collaboration.
6. Project methodologies and infrastructure to support collaboration needs to balance structure and flexibility to allow collaborative activities to establish and unfold in an evolving manner.
7. Central agencies can do much to encourage meaningful collaboration to take place.
8. The potential benefits that effective collaboration can provide suggest it is a meaningful alternative to institutional mergers in achieving gains for learners and communities and delivering value from the overall tertiary education budget.

Each of these conclusions will now be discussed in turn.

5.3.1 Conclusion 1 - Collaboration is generally considered to be positive, however it is challenging to initiate and implement. As a result, tertiary education institutions need to carefully consider why, when, how and with who they choose to collaborate.

The participants of this research generally viewed inter-institutional collaboration positively, and considered collaborative activities could potentially provide significant benefits to their institution and its related stakeholders. Most participants consciously sought to undertake collaborative activities rather than take a competitive approach to achieve specific institutional goals or respond to external pressures. Further, most participants’ distinguished collaboration from other forms of collective initiatives such as partnerships, joint ventures or contractual relationships; viewing collaboration to be:

… a slightly more in-depth trusting kind of experience, co-operation is often based on mutual self-interest; it suits us to do so we’ll do it. Collaboration I think of more of a strategic process involving really working together on something from the beginning and sharing the benefits (CE5).

While this study found tertiary institution leaders perceptions of collaboration to be largely positive, it also found that their experience of collaboration to often be difficult, challenging to initiate and implement, and fraught with issues. Most participants found collaborative activities to be more complex and time consuming than they initially expected, and many recognised that collaboration is often resource-hungry and expensive to implement.
For example:

I think just saying collaboration for its own sake’s a good thing, go away, collaborate, is really hopeless. A, because nobody’s got the time. B, because as a chief executive my responsibility to my council is to do things that enhance the financial well-being of the organisation and the kind of shareholder, stakeholder value in it. And simply collaboration is actually expensive of time and money and of a lot of people’s time, because typically it’s done at a number of layers in the organisation (CE11).

This conclusion reflects aspects of previous research reviewed during the literature review phase of this research. This includes Kuh and Robinson (1995) who discussed the practical challenges of implementing collaboration, and Thomas and Woodrow (2002) who recognised that often institutions have unrealistic expectations of the collaborative process, focusing on the prospect of positive outcomes without fully appreciating the effort, resources and timeframe required to effectively implement it. A particularly poignant observation comes from Kezar (2005) who points out that: “Over 50 percent of collaborations fail…” (Kezar 2005, p. 831), which possibly explains why so many studies seek to identify factors that will enhance the likelihood of collaborative ventures succeeding.

The research undertaken for this study provides new insights into institutional experiences of collaboration. First, as previously highlighted, little of the existing reviewed research is based on obtaining the direct personal views of tertiary institutional leaders based on their experience of collaboration. The existing reviewed research is generally based on the observations of academic researchers undertaking case studies of institutions involved in collaboration (Kyvik 2002; Rowley 1997). Further, these case studies usually involved a limited number of institutions; in general, the studies focus on two institutions and usually in the context of a merger. In contrast, this research is based on the direct personal experiences of a significant proportion of New Zealand tertiary education sector leaders and is drawn from a wide range of collaborative activities.

Second, this research also concludes that based on these findings, institutions need to carefully consider when, how and why they undertake collaboration and who they choose to collaborate with. A fresh contribution generated by this study is the concept that just because collaboration is considered a good thing to do, institutions should not rush into every
collaborative opportunity or consider collaboration as the universal means to achieving organisational goals. As described by one participant:

This notion that it’s inherently a good think to be getting into collaboration. I mean, it isn’t inherently a good thing. It’s inherently a good thing to be nice to each other and get on well but it doesn’t necessarily mean you have to collaborate… You know, lots of good ideas are around but is it worth the expenditure of effort. Could it be achieved in other ways…?

(CE17).

Instead, this study suggests that institutions need to have a clear understanding of how collaboration fits within the wider organisational direction and to ensure that staff throughout the organisation have a shared understanding of this. Further, this research highlights the need for institutions to be willing to ‘give something away’ and be committed to supporting the ‘other institutions’ outcomes’ in order to reap the potential rewards from collaboration. This notion is based on the emerging concept that while collaboration has the possibility to deliver greater gains than other inter-institutional agreements, it requires a greater willingness to contribute, at times disproportionately to the other participating parties and sometimes without any immediate gain.

5.3.2 Conclusion 2 - The main ingredients for successful collaboration include a number of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ factors; however, ‘soft’ factors are generally the most essential elements, contributing to the complex nature of most collaborative activity.

This study is similar to previous research in its quest to identify success factors for effective collaboration. There is a considerable amount of literature that examines various models of collaboration as discussed in sections 5.2.5 and 5.2.6 above. This research reinforces the findings of studies done by authors such as Thomas and Woodrow (2002), Short and Stein (2001) and (Daigle & Robinson 2000) that there is no one ‘cast-iron’ approach that ensures the success of collaborative activities. Further, this study reflects the findings of Breuder (1996), Ramsbottom and Baus (1999) and Silverman (1995) that contributing attributes include a range of ‘hard’ physical factors such as similarity in institution size and type and geographical proximity, and ‘soft’ value-based factors such as similarity in organisational culture and the level of trust between key individuals from the participating institutions.
An insight provided by this research is the relative weighting given by participants to soft factors; this resulted in the conclusion that these elements generally have the greatest influence on collaborative success. Most participants suggested factors such as strong relationships, trust, shared vision and mutual interest as the most important ingredients to effective collaboration, with some considering these factors to be essential for meaningful collaboration to take place at all. Further, a number of participants suggested that the existence of soft factors such as strong existing relationships could overcome potential barriers or undermining attributes such as differences in institutional size or nature, or geographical distance between the participating institutions.

A contributing factor to this conclusion was the semi-structured open interview data collection methodology that was utilised for this research. This approach not only allowed participants to contribute their views on a number of various topics and issues associated with collaboration, but to spend time and place emphasis on the elements of collaboration they considered to be most significant. This along with the grounded theory based data analysis process resulted in the conclusion that soft factors should be at the top of any checklist for key attributes for inter-institutional collaborative success, and that the principles on which collaboration is based is more important than the model that is applied: “… the principle that you’re applying is fairly consistent. The model that you apply, how you achieve that, will actually vary” (CE8).

This conclusion goes some way in explaining the complexity associated with collaboration and the challenge of identifying a standard model or approach that can be utilised in all collaborative situations. Hard factors such as institution type, size, proximity or availability of resources are much easier to identify, assess and ‘tick off’ at the preparatory stages and can be more universally applied than factors such as similarities in organisational culture or the degree to which key individuals can work together. This conclusion also suggests that institutions need to give greater consideration to what can often be considered as ‘fluffy’ factors when preparing business cases or undertaking cost-benefit analyses when assessing potential collaborative opportunities. Based on this conclusion, practical guidelines and suggested checklists for tertiary institution leaders have been developed as part of this research and are discussed in section 5.5 and included in appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.
5.3.3 Conclusion 3 - Collaboration is ‘all about the relationship’, which is often why collaboration is so challenging, time consuming and complicated to implement.

One of the over-riding conclusions from this study was the importance of relationships in the collaborative process. Participants frequently referred to the finding that strong relationships that are based on common values and mutual trust are the fundamental basis for effective collaboration, for example: “No relationship. No collaboration. End of story” (CE13). Discussions about possible issues and challenges often included commentary about the influence, positive or negative, that individual personalities can have on inter-institutional relationships and collaborative activities. Further, as discussed in section 5.3.2 above, participants cited the power of strong relationships in overcoming other potential barriers or challenges to collaboration.

The observation that: “it’s a very human activity, collaboration” (CE11), reflected the views of most participants in this study. It was also reflected in the choice of language used by participants to describe previous experiences or analogies of topics associated with the subject of collaboration, which were often described in terms of human interaction. For example, on the topic of the optimal number of partnering institutions for collaboration: “And I’ve often quoted in amusement or irritation by saying it’s like marriage, you know, how many mistresses can you handle?” (CE17). Human qualities were often cited in regard to how institutions behave during collaboration, for example, the suggestion that institutions need to allow themselves to be “vulnerable” (CE8) and willing to change to achieve the potential gains that collaboration can provide.

The emphasis on relationships was also reflected in the recognition that interaction at social events often seeded collaborative agreements. It was also reflected in the notion that collaborative relationships, similar to inter-personal relationships, need to have an element of ‘give and take’ about them; while ideally collaboration results in a ‘win-win’ outcome, the contributing parties need to be willing, at times, to contribute disproportionately to this end game. For example, “In a good relationship of any sort, you are expecting a net gain but you are going to have to give away at some point” (CE17).
The strong emphasis on relationships, including the influence of individual personalities, which emerged from this research is a contributing factor to the challenges and complexities often associated with collaborative activity. This includes the finding that individual personalities can be a barrier to an otherwise potentially beneficial collaborative opportunity from advancing, and the importance of ensuring that strong relationships between leaders of the partnering institutions is translated to effective working relationships at other levels of the participating organisations. The need for strong relationships as the basis for collaborative activity is also a contributing factor to the timeframe required to establish and advance collaborative initiatives. Most participants emphasised the need for any initiatives to have the requisite timeframe to ensure relationships were well established before any substantive activity took place.

The influence of inter-personal relationships in a collaborative setting has been the subject of previous research, including that undertaken by: Berquist (1995), Burkhardt (1994), (Martin & Samels 1993-94), Sargent and Waters (2004), Deem (2006), and Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998). This study adds strength to these findings, especially by placing particular significance on the importance of strong, productive working relationships as a vital attribute for successful collaboration. This conclusion, along with others, provided input into the practical guidelines and suggested checklists for tertiary institution managers discussed in section 5.5.

5.3.4 Conclusion 4 - One of the most important things a leader can do to assist effective collaboration is to stop and consider all the potential factors at the preparatory phase.

The role of leaders in collaboration was a particular focus for this research and is a subject area that has been extensively studied in the past. Most of the reviewed prior research, including studies by (Daigle & Robinson 2000), (Winkler 2006), Ibarra and Hansen (2011), Arbuthnott and Bone (1993) and (Vangen 2003), recognised the strong influence leaders can have in the preparation, initiation and implementation stages of collaboration. This research provides a number of new perspectives on the role of leaders in the collaborative setting, which are discussed in section 4.4.5 of the previous chapter and in section 5.2.4 above. As outlined in the above section, one of major outcomes from this research was the conclusion that one of the most important things a tertiary institution leader can do to maximise the
The likelihood of collaborative success is to consciously think through all of the variable contributing factors at the preparatory phase. While the previous research promulgates different possible models for collaboration and discusses the role of leaders within these models, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by identifying a checklist of factors for leaders or key individuals at the early stages, which encompasses the range of hard and soft elements that need to be considered. This checklist is discussed in section 5.5.1 and attached as Appendix 5.1.

The conclusion discussed in this sub-section resulted from a number of insights from this research. First, a number of the learnings shared by tertiary institution leaders were in hindsight to their experiences of collaboration and were not always factors that were considered before embarking on collaborative activity. Second, this research resulted in identifying a comprehensive range of elements that influence collaboration that were discussed in section 4.4.4 of the previous chapter, and have been collated into the aforementioned checklist for possible practical application within the wider sector. Third, one of the aims of this research was to identify ways in which leaders and institutions can prepare for collaboration to enhance the likelihood of success; this conclusion does much to contribute to this goal by suggesting that leaders ‘stop and think’ before taking any particular action. Supplementary to this conclusion is the role of leaders in ensuring their institution is organisationally ready to collaborate; a concept that is discussed further in the next section.

5.3.5 Conclusion 5 - Effective collaboration requires a ‘whole of organisation’ approach; leaders need to ensure their institution is organisationally ready before embarking on collaboration.

A significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on collaboration from this research is that effective collaboration benefits from an organisation-wide approach, and that leaders have an important role to in improving their institution’s readiness to collaborate. This conclusion is based on a number of findings from the research. First, a finding emerged from this research was that ‘organisational attitude’, the degree to which an organisation is pre-disposed to collaboration, is a key influencer on collaborative success. This finding, which is discussed in detail in section 4.4.4.1 in Chapter 4, was in recognition that effective collaboration required more than simply commitment from the chief executive or vice-
chancellor; it required understanding, support and involvement from staff at many levels in the organisation.

Second, this research uncovered the finding that institutions that are best placed for inter-institutional collaboration are those that have an existing culture of internal collaboration. A number of the research participants acknowledged the importance of ensuring internal collaboration existed within the organisation before looking to work co-operatively with other institutions. Linked to this conclusion, is the finding that fostering the optimal organisational culture for collaboration to thrive must be supported by a number of other elements, such as clear, agreed principles, adequate resources, effective communication and realistic timeframes, as discussed in section 5.2.5 above.

The literature reviewed for this research contained relatively limited commentary about the notion of ‘organisational attitude’ or ‘organisational readiness’ as being key underlying enablers to collaboration. Where this concept was explored, it was generally discussed in terms of conceptual analytical frameworks (Daigle & Robinson 2000) involving resources and geographical locations.

Some of the reviewed authors did discuss the steps an institution can take in preparation for collaboration, however these tended to be in wider management discussions rather than specifically related to the tertiary education sector. These examples included Adler, Heckscher and Prusack (2011) who suggested steps for institutional readiness, and the concept of pre-relationship planning discussed by Arbuthnot and Bone (1993). The concept of ensuring the whole organisation was adequately ‘ready’ for collaboration, both culturally and infrastructurally, emerged as a prevalent and significant finding from this study from the individual and collective contributions from research participants.

This conclusion suggests that there is much that leaders can do to ensure their institution is well placed to initiate, plan and implement collaboration as well as being a potentially attractive collaborative partner. This concept is discussed in section 4.4.5 of the previous chapter, with practical recommendations and guidelines for tertiary institution leaders outlined in section 5.5 of this chapter and attached in appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.
5.3.6 **Conclusion 6** - Project methodologies and infrastructure to support collaboration need to balance structure and flexibility to allow collaborative activities to establish and unfold in an evolving manner.

A significant conclusion that resulted from the quest to find the ideal model for collaboration was the notion that institutions need to take care when applying project methodologies to support collaborative initiatives. While most participants recognised the need for traditional business disciplines in collaborative activities, a number suggested that these disciplines are applied in a way that facilitates the relationship being formed and allows the goals and objectives to emerge and evolve. It was suggested that institutions could do well to put trust in the relationship being formed and be willing to not be too ‘attached’ to the desired and identified outcome at the early stage. For example:

> We’ve actually changed quite significantly the formalised approaches that were being used. It’s going from a very structured and formal MOU to something which is much more principle-based. So it’s moved away from a very detailed, operational thing to a very much more principled thing (CE16).

It was also suggested that applying project methodologies too rigorously could adversely constrain the potential benefits that could result from the collaborative relationship. This conclusion further reflects the importance of ‘soft’, value based attributes as core contributing factors to effective collaboration. It also reflects the challenges associated with implementing collaborative activities, in this case assessing and identifying the optimal degree of structure and business discipline to apply to each individual collaborative initiative.

While previous research, including that undertaken by Breuder (1996), Rowley (1997) and Martin and Samels (1993-94), recognises the importance of both relationships and business discipline as key ingredients in the collaborative mix, this study provides fresh insights into the relative importance of these factors in a collaborative setting. The contributions from participants suggest that, in general, institutions should put more weighting on developing the relationships between the participating individuals and institutions, and should develop systems and processes to support this approach. As stated by one participant: “So what would we do differently? We would probably spend more time up front and get the relationship to support the collaboration rather than the other way around” (CE2).
Further, this research suggests that effective collaborative relationships need to be entered with a long-term view. Unlike other business arrangements, such as contracts, which are time-bound, meaningful collaboration needs be based on enduring relationships. As stated by one participant:

A collaborative arrangement is something you enter into and you hope’s going to be an enduring relationship which will change and evolve over time, but it’s not something you’re looking to finish (CE10).

5.3.7 Conclusion 7 - Central agencies can do much to encourage meaningful collaboration to take place; however a change in approach is required to achieve this.

As discussed in section 5.2.8 above, the role of central agencies as an influencing factor in tertiary education collaboration was a significant focus for this research. The participants in this study had number of suggestions about how central policy-making and funding agencies could adapt their approach to foster greater meaningful collaboration in the sector and reduce the level of “collaboration for collaboration’s sake” (CE15). In general, these contributions suggested that central agencies could work more closely with the sector to identify the ways in which collaboration could achieve the desired outcomes of efficiency gains, reduced overall expenditure and enhanced learning outcomes for individual learners in communities throughout the country.

As with other aspects of collaboration, such as partner selection and models for implementation, participants highlighted the need for central agencies to appreciate the challenges of applying a universal rule or policy guideline to collaboration. Participants suggested that the current approach by central agencies is adapted to provide more flexibility about the what, why, when, how and with whom aspects of collaboration in recognition that each individual collaborative initiative requires a tailored approach.

As previously discussed, there has been little prior research into the role of central agencies in inter-institutional collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education context. Previous research reviewed for this study included discussion about the role of central agencies in other countries, primarily in the western world, which is discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
and in section 5.2.8 of this chapter (Abbott 1996; Kyvik 2002; Martin 1996). As a result, the findings and conclusions from this research provide a significant contribution to the body of knowledge about collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. Opportunities for further research on this subject area within this setting are discussed in section 5.8 below.

5.3.8 Conclusion 8 - The potential benefits that effective collaboration can provide suggests it is meaningful alternative to institutional mergers in achieving gains for learners and communities and delivering value from the overall tertiary education budget.

Another conclusion from this study is the potential value that can be gained from meaningful collaboration within the tertiary education sector in New Zealand. Most participants considered collaboration as having the potential to deliver greater benefits than other business arrangements such as contracts and partnerships. A contributing factor to this view was the notion of “two plus two equals five” (CE16); that working collaboratively with another institution can provide greater gains than could be achieved by the institutions working alone.

Another contributing factor was the view that collaboration does not require or need to result in the loss of identity of any of the participating organisations as occurs in arrangements such as mergers. As mentioned by one participant: “But if we merged we peel off some very unique components that make it beneficial to work with an associate or have a collaborative venture” (CE6). These collective views suggest collaboration can be a meaningful alternative to institutional mergers in achieving benefits for the individual organisations and the wider sector, as well as learners in communities and regions nationwide. One participant summarised the view of many of the participants in the study:

The real thing I’m aspiring to is showing the sector that it is possible for two organisations to together achieve a whole heap of things, for the students and for the stakeholders and in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness without merging… (CE17).

As previously discussed, the reviewed literature largely focuses on collaboration within the context of mergers and amalgamations, and usually examines collaboration within the context of bi-lateral arrangements (Arbuthnott & Bone 1993; Kuh & Robinson 1995; Parkyn 1999). One of the contributions to the existing body of knowledge that this study provides is
research into collaborative activity involving multiple institutions and where the participating institutions retain their individual and separate identity throughout the collaborative process.

Further, the findings from this study suggest that effective collaboration is a distinctly different business activity from mergers, with participants entering collaborative relationships without any intention of a merger being a potential outcome of the arrangement. This notion is reflected in some of the reviewed literature, particularly in Rowley (1997), with contrasting views held by other authors, including Lang (2002). Some of the other authors that were reviewed did suggest that the benefits that collaboration has the potential to deliver make it worth the challenges and issues that seem to accompany implementing it (Fenwick 2006; Hostetter 1988).

5.3.9 Summary

As discussed in this and the previous section (5.2), this study makes a number of significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on inter-institutional collaboration. The following table is a brief summary of these contributions.

Table 5.3 Contributions from the research and associated justification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Research into inter-institutional collaboration within the New Zealand</td>
<td>• Little existing research into collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.</td>
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<tr>
<td>tertiary education sector.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Research scope includes collaboration involving multiple institutions.</td>
<td>• The preponderance of reviewed research focuses on bi-lateral collaborative arrangements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Research scope focuses on collaboration where the participating institutions retain their separate and distinct identity through the collaborative process.</td>
<td>• The prevalent reviewed research focuses on mergers and amalgamations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Utilisation of grounded theory to base research on direct personal experiences of tertiary institution leaders.</td>
<td>• No evidence in reviewed literature of grounded theory being utilised in studies of inter-institutional collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
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<td>5. Formation of guidelines for tertiary education institution leaders to</td>
<td>• New data-grounded tool to aid effective management of collaborative activity in</td>
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<td>consider at the preparatory phase of collaboration.</td>
<td>New Zealand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Development of a theoretical model to assist in understanding drivers of</td>
<td>• New data-grounded model to advance understanding of underlying drivers of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration.</td>
<td>collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Development of a theoretical model to aid best practice in implementing</td>
<td>• New data-grounded model for practical application to advance effectiveness of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration.</td>
<td>tertiary education sector collaboration.</td>
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Source: Developed for this research

5.4 Implications for theory

5.4.1 Introduction

This section discusses the implications of this research on existing theory related to the research subject area and associated disciplines. The section discusses implications on the ‘parent’ theory, outlined in Chapter 2, of New Zealand tertiary education institution collaboration, and on the following wider subject areas:

1. Tertiary education institution collaboration – in countries other than New Zealand.
2. Inter-institutional relationships – between tertiary institutions and other organisations (that is, that are not tertiary institutions) in New Zealand.
3. Organisational collaboration in New Zealand in general – that is, not just in the tertiary education sector.
4. Inter-organisational relationships – that is, other forms of inter-organisational relationships that are not specifically collaboration.
5.4.2 Implications for the parent theory

The first implication from this research for the parent theory of tertiary institution collaboration in New Zealand is the seeming absence of an existing theory being widely used by leaders in the sector. None of the participants in this study suggested a generic theoretical framework or model that they referred to or utilised in undertaking collaborative activity. This section outlines theories that were drawn from the data that was collected and analysed for this research. The section concludes by discussing an overarching framework that incorporates these two theoretical models.

The second implication from this research for the parent theory that was driven from the data collected for this research is that tertiary education institution collaboration in New Zealand is both a theoretical construct and a management process. Figure 5.1 depicts this theoretical model.

Figure 5.1 Grounded theory interwoven with data research and design

Source: Developed for this research

This figure lists the theoretical constructs on the upper level of: definition, trigger point and institutional values, and their respect influences on collaboration as a management process. Definition refers to the precise nature of the inter-institutional activity, for example, whether it is a time-bound specific contractual relationship or collaboration as an open-ended enduring relationship encompassing multiple activities and where the parties retain their
institutional autonomy. Trigger point refers to the impetus to consider collaboration. This could be as a result of external forces such as central policy agencies requiring collaboration to occur; it could also be due to drivers such as financial necessity. Institutional values refers to the norms and cultural values of the institutions involved. This also encompasses the institutions’ predisposition and ‘organisational attitude’ to collaborate. The diagram implies there is an element of summation in the upper level; that is the cumulative effect of these constructs combined and this collective influence on best practice.

The lower level of the diagram shows collaboration as a management process being described as: models of collaboration (heavily influenced by the theoretical construct of definition), motivation to collaborate (considerably influenced by the trigger that spurs this motivation) and the relationship process between the participating institutions (significantly influenced by the institutional values of those institutions). Models refers to the varying ways that collaborative activity can be manifested, such as sharing of resources or curriculum. Motivation relates to the identified rationale or reason for the collaboration, such as generating organisational efficiencies or providing enhanced learning opportunities for learners within the institution’s catchment. Relationship process refers to the intra and inter-institutional engagement and subsequent relationship development. In contrast to the summation effect of the theoretical constructs on the upper level of the diagram, there is considerable iteration between models, motivation and the relationship process, and the extent and degree of this iteration is a significant factor in how the collaborative process occurs.

This model, derived from the data, provides insights that could be considered by policy makers and tertiary education sector leaders in identifying ways to improve best practice; particularly in understanding the trigger and motivation to collaborate and factors associated with partner selection, especially in terms of similarity of cultural values of the potential partner institutions. This is discussed further in section 5.5.

Figure 5.2 below illustrates how the combination of the theoretical framework and research methodology of grounded theory that underpinned this study, the literature review that was undertaken, and the data collected and analysed for this research contributed to the development of the theoretical model depicted in Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.2 Combination of theoretical framework and literature review with figure 5.1

Source: developed from Figure 2.1, 5.1 and refined by research data for this research
In addition to developing the theoretical model depicted above in Figure 5.1, which was derived from the data that was collected and analysed, the learnings from the research suggested the adaptation of an existing theoretical model by McKnight, Cummings and Chervany (1998) that analysed the role of trust in the formation of institutional relationships. This adaptation is shown in Figure 5.3 below. It should be noted that, in general, the diagram reads from left to right, however considerable iteration does occur between the three factors depicted.

Figure 5.3  The role of trust within collaboration

Source: Adapted from McKnight (1998) and based on data from research
The adapted model depicts the relationships between the disposition to collaborate, the situational context, and the cognitive processes that collectively influence collaborative activity and how it is manifested. Disposition refers to the contributing elements to collaborative stance, or attitudes to collaboration, and the degree of trust and existing relationships between the participating individual and institutions. Context refers to the situational context and influences on the institutions involved, such as financial pressures or market forces, along with structural elements that can impact the nature of collaborative activity, such as the size, nature and proximity of the participating institutions. Cognitive processes are concerned with leadership and the extent to which leaders categorise the nature of the collaborative activity along with their capacity to alter and vary the extent of their control over the relationship and nature of the activity. In this model, factors relating to disposition can impact collaborative activity directly or via the filter of the structural and situational contexts.

The collective influence of these three factors defines the manifestation of the collaboration and resultant collaborative activity. These manifestations include: autonomy, openness, aspiration, ‘do no harm’, and net-sum-gain of the relationship. The cumulative analysis of the findings and contributions discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3 together with the theoretical models developed and discussed above has led to the development of an overarching framework that illustrates the main factors influencing tertiary education institutional collaboration in New Zealand. This framework is depicted in Figure 5.4.
At the centre of this diagram are the key elements that represent the core aspects of inter-institutional relationships. These elements have been derived from the data and include: trust, shared benefit, and the nature of the relationship. This study supported the finding that there are two distinct paths that the nature of this relationship could take. First, the more the relationship is undertaken as an ongoing ‘journey’, the greater the likelihood that the relationship is of a collaborative nature where the participating parties are highly committed but want to maintain their institutional autonomy. The alternative path, depicted on the diagram as the continuum towards alignment, is typified by institutions who want to work closely together but have a clear view of the relationship being time-bound. This is influenced by the institutions’ view of the co-operative activity being a ‘destination’.
The x axis of the diagram features the descriptors of attributes and aspiration. These descriptors are not on a continuum but capture different factors that influence the trigger point for collaborative activity to occur. Aspirations relates strongly to the leader’s attitudes and pre-dispositions to inter-institutional activity. Attributes represent the institution’s characteristics and the degree to which it is open to and adequately prepared for inter-institutional activity.

Where there exists the desire to maintain institutional autonomy along with the preference to engage in an enduring relationship, the inter-institutional activity tends towards collaboration. In contrast, where the relationship leans more towards a time-bound working partnership, the inter-institutional relationship is perhaps more aptly described as co-operation. This distinction represents a key implication for theory for academics and practitioners alike.

In addition, the model suggests that collaboration can result from both the aspirations of an institutional leader that wishes to embark on a deliberate course of inter-institutional activity or can come about in a more opportune fashion in situations where an institution and/or its leader is acutely responsive to potential opportunities to collaborate. This approach can also apply to co-operative activity, as reflected in the diagram.

The framework depicted in Figure 5.4 provides a major contribution to advancing understanding about inter-institutional collaboration within the sector and forms the base of the practical guidelines and tools for best practice which are discussed further in section 5.5. This figure represents in a stylised and simplified fashion, the complete answer to the research problem at the centre of this study.

5.4.3 Implications for broader theory

The implications of this research that are discussed in the section above are relevant to the wider subject areas listed at the start of this section. These are now discussed in terms of:

1. Implications for tertiary education institution collaboration in countries other than New Zealand.
2. Inter-organisational relationships in general – including relationships between tertiary education institutions and industry organisations, collaborative arrangements between organisations that are not in the tertiary education sector, and other forms of inter-organisational relationships that are not specifically collaboration.

These implications are now briefly discussed in turn.

5.4.3.1 Implications for tertiary education institution collaboration in countries other than New Zealand

A major finding from this research is that the central policy and regulatory environment has a relatively minor effect on the predisposition of institutions to collaborate or on the nature of the collaborative activity that took place. As stated by one participant:

The closest we’ve got to it is that what we’re doing turned out to align with the language of the central government of the day and the central agencies. We were able to exploit it for some funding. But make not mistake about it, everything we’ve done we would have done without them (CE10).

Contributions such as this one suggests that New Zealand tertiary education institutions undertake collaborative activity regardless of the potential influencing factor of central policy or funding agencies. This finding suggests that the contributions of this research have implications beyond the New Zealand context and could be of relevance to tertiary sector collaboration in other countries.

5.4.3.2 Implications for inter-organisational relationships in general

A key conclusion from this research was the relative importance of soft value-based factors, such as trust and relationships, in comparison to hard physical factors, such as institution size and type, in initiating and undertaking collaborative activity. This finding suggests that the contributions of this research have relevance to organisations and industries outside of the tertiary education sector. This encompasses tertiary education institutions collaborating with wider industry, and non-tertiary education institutions working co-operatively together.
In summary, the major conclusions and theoretical implications from this research are relatively non-specific to the tertiary education sector in New Zealand. This suggests a high degree of generalisability, or workability in grounded theory terms, to inter-organisational activity related to other types of institutions and other sectors, and relevance to countries outside of New Zealand. This also suggests there are significant opportunities for further research in these broader areas; these opportunities are discussed in section 5.8.

5.5 Implications for policy and practice

5.5.1 Implications for practice

This research has a number of major implications for the practice of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. These implications are drawn from the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and the conclusions and theoretical implications discussed earlier in this chapter.

These implications have been summarised as follows:

1. Collaboration is a distinct and separate inter-institutional business activity that is characterised by the participating institutions retaining their individual identity and the relationship being an enduring rather than time-bound one.

While collaboration is often used as a generic term to encompass a range of inter-organisational initiatives, one of the major findings from this study is that collaboration is distinctly different from other co-operative business activities such as partnerships. From the collective contributions of participants emerged the definition of collaboration as inter-institutional activity that is based on a long term, rather than time-bound, relationship and where the participating institutions retain their individual identity throughout the process. Importantly, this research found that collaboration is not a step on the continuum to merger; the participants in this study clearly distinguished collaboration as being a quite distinct activity from mergers in any guise. These findings suggest that it is important for the partnering institutions to identify and agree at the early stages of inter-institutional activity
what the nature of the initiative is going to be. This will assist in determining the associated
motivation, timeframe and type of activity that will occur, and will aid in managing
expectations and fostering common understanding among all the parties involved.

2. There seems to be no one generic model that New Zealand tertiary education institution
leaders draw on when contemplating, planning or undertaking collaboration.

This study sought to identify a model for best practice that could be applied to the New
Zealand tertiary education sector. A major finding from this research is that there seems to be
no one generic model that tertiary institution leaders referred to or drew on when preparing or
undertaking collaboration. Further, the study found that a tailored approach needed to be
taken for each collaborative initiative to identify and establish the appropriate key success
indicators for each individual situation. The study did identify a list of factors that could be
considered at the preparatory of collaboration to enhance the likelihood of success; this
checklist has been incorporated into the guidelines listed in the next part of this section.

These findings suggest that tertiary institution leaders need to take a fresh approach for each
individual collaborative initiative and need to consider all of the various factors that can
influence its success. Further, while there is no one universal model that can guarantee
success, there are a number of identified elements that can be considered in each situation to
maximise the likelihood of a planned collaborative initiative achieving the desired outcomes
and benefits.

3. Effective collaboration involves more ‘thinking’ prior to ‘doing’.

A major finding from this study was the importance of institutions, and leaders in particular,
stopping to think through all of the various factors that can influence collaboration at the
preparatory phase to maximise the likelihood of success for the planned initiative. This
concept extends to include institutions considering whether collaboration is in fact the most
efficacious path for achieving a particular goal or addressing a particular need, a concept that
is discussed further in point 4 below.
4. Collaboration is not always the best approach to building inter-institutional relationships, achieving particular outcomes, or addressing specific issues or external pressures.

While this study found that most tertiary education institution leaders consider collaboration to be a positive activity that has the potential to provide considerable benefits for an institution and its relevant stakeholders, the study also found collaboration to be a time consuming, resource intensive and often frustrating and challenging exercise. The contributions from the study’s participants suggested institutions need to carefully consider whether collaboration is the most appropriate path to take in each situation or whether in the words of one participant: “Could it be achieved in other ways rather than through some sort of collaborative venture? There are sometimes other solutions that are simpler” (CE17).

This concept is particularly apt in situations where two or more institutions have a different view as to the nature of their commitment to the relationship. Meaningful collaboration requires all of the participating partners to have a common view of their level of commitment and willingness to contribute to a collaborative initiative, even if the institutions are contributing in a disproportionate manner. These findings suggest that rather than assuming a collaborative opportunity will by its very nature be a positive activity, institutions need to give careful consideration to collaborative approaches and to any plans to initiate collaboration.

5. Being ‘organisationally ready’ is an important first step in the preparatory phase of collaboration.

A major conclusion from this study was the importance of institutions being organisationally ready to participate in collaboration. This included having a clear view on the role of collaboration in the organisation’s strategic direction, ensuring staff at as many levels as possible in the organisation are aware of this defined purpose and understand how they can contribute, and ensuring the appropriate resources and supporting processes, such as effective communications, are available and/or in place. It also includes ensuring the institution has the most apposite organisational attitude or predisposition to collaborate and the associated willingness to be open to doing things differently and being prepared for potential change.
These findings suggest being organisationally ready is an important first step for institutions in preparing to work collaboratively with others.

6. Effective partner selection involves finding the right ‘institutional fit’ between the participating organisations.

This study found that a willingness to collaborate is not in itself sufficient criteria to make an institution an effective collaborative partner. Participants in this study often referred to the importance of finding the right ‘fit’ in terms of partnering institutions. Further, participants emphasised the relative importance of soft, valued based factors, such as the strength of existing relationships or the existing level of trust between institution leaders, in the selection process, weighting these factors higher than hard, physical factors such as similarity in institution type or size. These findings challenge some commonly held assumptions about enabling features for collaborative partners such as close geographic proximity. The findings also suggest that institutions need to carefully consider potential partner institutions to ensure they are the best fit for the planned collaborative initiative.

7. Being an effective collaborative partner often requires being open to change and being willing to give something away, at times without immediate and/or equal gain.

This study found that a key ingredient to effective collaboration is willingness by participating institutions to be open to change and working differently, along with a willingness to contribute generously in terms of information or resources, at times disproportionately to the other partnering institutions and sometimes without any immediate gain. This concept, together with other findings, suggests that being an effective collaborative partner requires a degree of flexibility, a high threshold of trust, and a firm belief in the collective long term benefits that collaboration can provide.

8. Effective collaborative implementation involves incorporating the right mix of project structure and business discipline with flexibility and openness to change.

While most participants in this study highlighted the importance of having robust business processes and disciplines in place to support collaborative activities, a number also referred to
the need for flexibility in preparing for and implementing collaborative initiatives. This willingness to let collaborative initiatives unfold in an almost organic fashion reinforces the theme that emerged from the data of the need for flexibility and adaptability to change during collaboration. This suggests that collaborative implementation processes need to provide sufficient structure to establish and operationalise the initiative while allowing the activity to advance in the most unconstrained and appropriate manner.

**Practical tools**

Based on the implications listed above, a number of suggested practical tools to aid and assist tertiary education sector leaders have been developed and are listed below. These tools, in the form of checklists, have been developed directly from the findings of this research and the implications listed in this section. The checklists are included in appendices 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. The checklists have not been tested for practical application as part of this particular study; this could be done as a component of future research into this subject area. This is discussed further in section 5.8.

1. **Appendix 5.1: Guidelines for practice: preparatory stage of collaboration** – this checklist aims to provide a practical guide to aid tertiary education sector leaders at the preparatory stage of collaboration to enhance the likelihood of collaborative success. The checklist seeks to advance the practice of leaders and other key individuals considering all the various relevant factors before entering into a specific collaborative initiative, and includes suggested activities that could be undertaken to address each factor.

2. **Appendix 5.2: Guidelines for partner selection** – this checklist aims to assist tertiary education institution leaders and other key individuals when considering partners for collaborative activity, and highlights the various factors that should be reviewed and contemplated as part of this process. These factors have been listed in order of relative importance as derived from the research data and discussed in section 4.4.3, along with some considerations relating to each factor. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is no generic tick list of attributes that determine a suitable collaborative partner; however, there are a number of factors that can be considered in each situation to assess the degree of institutional fit between the partnering institutions.
3. Appendix 5.3: Guidelines for collaborative opportunities – this checklist aims to highlight the major factors that key individuals in tertiary education institutions should consider when assessing a potential collaborative opportunity; this includes highlighting the potential enablers, as well as disenablers, to meaningful collaboration.

5.5.2 Implications for public sector policy

This study has a number of significant implications for public policy in the area of tertiary education institutional collaboration. These implications are drawn from the findings discussed in section 4.4.6 of Chapter 4 and the conclusions outlined in sections 5.2.8 and 5.3.7 above. These implications are listed and discussed below.

1. To foster more effective collaboration in the tertiary education sector, central policy-makers should consider adopting a ‘permission’ versus ‘prescription’ approach.

The data collected during this study suggests that enforced collaboration is relatively ineffective in fostering meaningful collaboration in the tertiary education sector. Instead, participants considered the current approach has resulted in institutions collaborating solely with the purpose of obtaining additional funding or to meet compliance requirements. The data suggests that central policy-makers and funding agencies could more effectively advance meaningful collaboration by providing permission for the sector to collaborate in the way it considered most efficacious, and be less prescriptive in the way this is done.

2. Collaboration should not be considered as a possible step on the continuum to inter-institutional merger.

The findings of this study suggest that collaboration is a distinctly different way of working co-operatively with one or more institutions and should not be considered a possible step on the continuum to inter-institutional merger. Further, most of the participants in this study had a relatively negative view of collaboration being used as a smokescreen to possible merger. Instead, participants suggested that policy-makers and funding agencies are more up-front when merger is the desired outcome of inter-institutional activity. These findings suggest that
collaboration and mergers should be considered and categorised more distinctly, and that policy-makers should be more overt in determining which approach is to be used in specific situations.

3. In assessing potential partners in collaboration proposals, greater weighting should be given to factors such as the strength of existing working relationships rather than factors such as similarity in institution size or location of the participating institutions.

One of the major conclusions from this study was the relative importance of soft, value based attributes such as existing relationships and trust compared to hard physical factors such as similarity in organisation type and size as enablers for effective collaboration. The findings of this study suggest that central policy makers and funding agencies could give greater weighting towards these factors when establishing criteria for preferred partners in central policy and/or when assessing collaborative proposals for funding approval. Further, central agencies could provide tertiary institutions with greater scope for determining the most appropriate partners for particular initiatives.

4. Central policy and funding guidelines should provide more flexibility in the way institutions choose to collaborate and more freedom to determine the most optimal way collaboration could deliver the desired outcomes and results.

The findings of this study suggest that there is no one generic model that can guarantee collaborative success. The findings also suggest that enforced collaboration is ineffectual and that current central policy and funding criteria can be a potential barrier to achieving the potential benefits of effective collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector. These collected findings suggest that one of the best ways of fostering greater meaningful collaboration in the sector is to provide more flexibility for individual institutions to choose the most appropriate course of collaboration for them to deliver the desired benefits and outcomes.
5. Central policy-makers and funding agencies should consider taking a position of ‘benevolent neutrality’ to advance inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector.

The data from this study suggests that the most apposite position central policy and funding agencies could take to foster greater meaningful collaboration is one of ‘benevolent neutrality’; that is, a position that encourages collaboration to take place without too rigorous compliance criteria or requirements. Participants in this study suggested that central agencies could potentially best advance sector collaboration by determining the desired outcome or gains to be achieved by collaboration and then allowing the sector and individual institutions within it to determine how best to undertake collaborative activities to achieve these.

5.6 Limitations

This section discusses the limitations associated with this study that came about from the research process. Delimitations associated with this study are discussed in section 1.7 of Chapter 1 and limitations relating to the research methodology are outlined in section 3.3.5 of Chapter 3. During the research process no other limitations related to the study became apparent.

A particular strength of this study is that the sample size represents a significant proportion of the total population. The sample included 17 out of a possible total population of 28 research participants.

The application of grounded theory, rather than testing a hypothesis, was a novel approach for the research problem and certainly facilitated a data collection process that was effective in obtaining a large volume of insightful primary source material. Section 3.2 of Chapter 3 outlines the potential strengths and weaknesses related to the research methodology of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). This study was undertaken in a manner that mitigated the possible weaknesses and maximised the potential benefits of applying this methodology. The flexibility provided by this methodology was fundamental in obtaining an abundant amount of contributing data. At the same time, the data collection and analysis processes were undertaken in a rigorous and disciplined fashion to ensure analytical robustness.
It is acknowledged that any research carries some form of limitations, for example, the researcher’s closeness to the subject material can result in undue subjectivity. The potential for bias is acknowledged and such disclosure assists in ensuring transparency and maintaining the integrity of the research. Care was taken to ensure that all conclusions and implications discussed earlier in this chapter were based solely on the findings of Chapter 4.

In summary, the possible limitations of this study do not detract from the strength of the findings and their potential implications for the policy and practice of inter-institutional collaboration in the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

5.7 Implications for methodology

There are a number of implications for methodology that resulted from this study. In terms of the sample selection, the seniority of the tertiary education institution leaders interviewed for this research made a strong contribution to the meaningful and productive nature of the interviews, with dialogue flowing in an open and unconstrained way and resulting in the abundant amount of source data.

The most significant discovery from this study was how successful the semi-structured open interview technique was in capturing the information that provided the basis of the findings and implications of this study. This, together with other factors such as the face-to-face nature of the interviews; the process of writing up the interview notes immediately following interviews; and the prompt transcription of the recorded interviews; provided considerable momentum and depth to the associated analytical process.

There was a related learning in regard to the timeframe for the data collection process. While most of the interviews were undertaken in a short and co-ordinated time period, one interview was rescheduled and held two months after the main data collection process. This delayed interview was an administrative inconvenience and created a data disruption in the data analysis process.
The timeframe for the study was a contributing factor to the integrity of the research. First, there was a delay of 24 months between the substantive literature review and the data collection and analysis stages. Second, the data collection and analysis phases were not linear; rather than being a hindrance, this ‘broken journey’ facilitated the development of fresh perspectives and assisted in uncovering previously unseen potential for analysis and theory development in the data. Returning to the thesis after periods of research inactivity facilitated significant insights and provided a stronger analytical, rather than documentary-type, basis to the study, particularly in Chapters 2 and 4. In addition, the grounded theory data analysis process of constant iteration facilitated the progression of the study from mere description towards analytical value.

A particularly useful text from the literature was Charmaz’s 2006 book *Constructing Grounded Theory*, which was central to the selection of the research methodology and provided the confirmation that it would be the most efficacious research approach to take to address the research problem. Grounded theory was considered to be particularly appropriate in obtaining insights as the data was collected via in-depth inter-personal interaction.

### 5.8 Implications for further research

This study provides a number of possible avenues for future research, which are discussed below. The first list relates to possible research areas; the second list relates to different research methodologies that could be applied to the subject area.

#### 5.8.1 Possible research areas

1. The relationship between intention and action in respect to inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector.

   This research would investigate whether the intent for a collaborative initiative that was identified and articulated by the research participants was matched by the subsequent activity that occurred in practice, effectively testing how collaborative issues play out in practice. The purpose of this research would be to identify the extent to which words are
matched by actions. Another possible area of research could be investigating the notion of pre-disposition and fostering an organisational culture that is open to collaboration.

2. Testing the findings and implications as to their generalisability for other types of tertiary education institutions in New Zealand.

   This would involve extending the research scope to include other types of tertiary education institutions such as wananga and industry training organisations.

3. Testing the findings and implications as to their generalisability for tertiary education institutions in other countries.

   Exploring the delimitations that narrowed the scope for this research study could provide a large number of areas for possible research.

4. Testing the findings and implications as to their generalisability for non-tertiary education institutions, for example, in broader management practice.

   The extent to which the findings and implications of this study have broader management applications, whether in New Zealand or in overseas countries, could also be an avenue of possible future research.

5. The impact of collaborative activity on the various stakeholders of institutions.

   This study was focused on tertiary education institution leaders discussing inter-institutional collaborative activity. A similar study could be undertaken with the major stakeholders of these institutions. For example, a grounded theory research methodology could be used to interview the major employers of tertiary graduates within New Zealand to ascertain their perspective on the extent and success of collaborative behaviour within New Zealand tertiary education institutions.
6. Factors relating to governance in inter-institutional collaboration.

This research could investigate factors influencing the governance aspects of inter-institutional collaboration in the tertiary education sector. For example, whether at a governance level there was a greater or lesser degree of institutional parochialism and the impact this could have on inter-institutional collaboration.

7. Testing the relative importance of trust as a key variable in collaborative activity.

A recurring theme within this study was the fundamental importance of trust between the individuals involved in collaborative activity. A new area of research could be to test a hypothesis using trust as the key variable.

8. Testing the impact of economic conditions on tertiary education institutions’ conduciveness to collaboration or competition.

This research could investigate the degree to which, if at all, economic conditions influence tertiary education institutions’ behaviour in regard to collective activity.

9. Testing of practical guidelines outlined in section 5.5.

Testing the guidelines discussed in section 5.5 for their utility and effectiveness in practical application could be another area of possible research.

5.8.2 Possible research methodologies

1. A positivist case study that could encompass the entire collaborative process from idea conception through preparation to implementation and outcome evaluation.

This study took a constructivist approach to addressing the research problem. An alternative area of possible future research is to undertake the same study utilising a positivist approach. Further, the results of both studies could then be combined,
contributing to the body of knowledge and enhancing the generalisability of the collected findings.

2. A comparative study between two distinct collaborative activities; one that is very planning-focused with the adoption of project methodologies and formal contractual arrangements, and one that is very people-focused and relies primarily on inter-personal relationships as the basis of obligation between the participating institutions.

This study uncovered differing views on the extent to which formal project methodologies and business practices acted as enablers or disenablers for collaborative activity. There was also a disparity of opinion as to the degree to which New Zealand tertiary education institutions could rely upon inter-personal relationships as being a sufficient basis for the specific collaborative activity. A possible research problem area could encompass a comparative analysis between these various factors.

3. A quantitative survey of tertiary education sector employees to test some of the findings outlined in sections 5.2 and 5.3, and the practical guidelines suggested in section 5.5 of this chapter.

The scope of this research could include employees and different management levels in New Zealand tertiary education institutions to gain their insights into inter-institutional collaborative activity.

5.9 Summary

The area of inter-institutional collaboration is of particular relevance in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. This is due to the prevailing sector context that encourages and incentivises collaboration, and because of the considerable resources that are deployed within the sector to collaborative initiatives each year. This study sought to advance the practice of collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector to enhance the efficaciousness of planned initiatives and to maximise the potential return on taxpayer investment that effective collaboration can provide. The study also aimed to address the dearth of previous research into this important sector activity within the New Zealand context.
The scope for this study was focussed on undertaking a ‘narrow and deep’ investigation involving tertiary education institution leaders to collate a considerable body of data from which theories could be built and knowledge for best practice could be developed for future practical application. The core of this study, and the theories and practical guidelines that resulted, is the direct quotations of the research participants. This primary source material formed the essential building blocks of the research findings and in turn, the implications for theory and practical application.

The New Zealand tertiary education institution leaders that were interviewed for this research did not reference any existing literature or theoretical or practical models during the data collection process. Instead, tertiary institution leaders drew upon the learnings from previous collaborative experience along with their innate approach to management when contemplating or undertaking collaborative initiatives. This finding, together with the other conclusions from this research, suggest there is considerable opportunities for sector leaders to leverage off this research, either by considering its findings, utilising the practical guidelines that are suggested, or using it as a reference for future research into the subject area. Further, the major contributions of this research are the development of a theoretical model, practical tools and implications for central policy-makers that have been drawn from the New Zealand setting and are based on the direct experience and learnings of leaders actively involved in this management activity within this context.

This study in turn confirmed and challenged previously researched attributes and commonly held perceptions of enablers to collaboration. The study suggests that having an optimal organisation-wide attitude to collaboration and finding the partner with the right institutional ‘fit’ is a much sounder basis for effective collaboration than factors such as close geographical proximity or similarity in institutional form between potential partners. It also suggests that while there is no one universal recipe for successful collaboration, there are methods that can be followed to determine the best ingredients to select for the desired type of collaborative cake. A common theme amongst research participants was the importance of strong productive relationships as the central ingredient to meaningful collaboration, suggesting that sustainable collaboration arises from sustainable relationships.
This study found that meaningful inter-institutional collaboration has the capacity to deliver significant benefits to New Zealand tertiary education institutions and the sector as a whole. The findings from this research have the potential to contribute significantly to enhancing understanding of this complex management activity and advancing best practice among tertiary education institutional and associated sector leaders.


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Appendices
Appendix 2.1 List of 16 journals initially accessed for literature review

1. Higher Educational Quarterly
2. Management Communication Quarterly
4. Educational Record (became The Presidency: The magazine for Higher Education)
5. Studies in Higher Education
6. Journal of Educational Administration
7. Higher Education
8. The Review of Higher Education
9. Planning for Higher Education
10. Australian Universities Review
11. European Journal of Higher Education
12. Research in Higher Education
13. Academy of Management Review
14. Comparative Education
15. Canadian Journal of Higher Education
16. Higher Education Research & Development
Appendix 3.1 Documentation sent to each potential research participant

3 September 2008

[Name]
[Title]
[Organisation]
[Address line 1]
[Address line 2]

Dear [Name]

Re: Doctoral research into tertiary institutional preparation for collaborative activity.

I am supervising a doctoral student, Donovan Wearing who is undertaking a DBA study through the Graduate School of Management, Southern Cross University which is based in New South Wales, Australia. The programme is offered in New Zealand through the Manukau Institute of Technology.

The student is conducting research into the manner in which New Zealand tertiary institutions prepare for collaborative activity with the aim of identifying and promulgating a best practice managerial toolkit.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. If you agree to do so then I shall advise Donovan Wearing and he will arrange an opportunity for him to interview you at your convenience. The interview will be conducted by Donovan Wearing and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Southern Cross University. For your information, I have attached an information sheet, a consent form (which should be returned to me), an interview guide that has been prepared by the researcher to provide you with a framework of the issues that the researcher would like to discuss in the interview which we anticipate will last approximately 90 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. Please be assured that your participation in this research and the identity of your institution is in every way confidential.

It would be valuable if the interview could be recorded as it will assist greatly with the data analysis. After the data analysis is completed the researcher will provide you with a transcript and with a summary report of the findings of the project.
The research will be published as part of the doctoral thesis and may also be used as a basis for conference papers, journal articles and the like. As indicated above, the information you provide will be kept completely anonymous and confidential and the researcher will disguise all participants in the thesis and any subsequent material.

Please contact me to confirm your willingness to participate or if you require any further information either via email stuart.middleton@manukau.ac.nz, mail Private Bag 94006, South Auckland Mail Centre, or via phone 09 968 7692. If you are willing to participate in this research can you please provide contact details so suitable and convenient interview arrangements can be made.

If you do not wish to participate in the research would you please indicate this to me.

If you have any concerns with the manner in which this research is being conducted, you can contact the Southern Cross University Complaints officer at:

Ms Sue Kelly
Ethics Complaints Officer and Secretary
HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Telephone (02) 6626-9139 or fax (02) 6626-9145
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

Thank you again for considering this invitation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stuart Middleton

stuart.middleton@manukau.ac.nz
09-968 7692
CONSENT FORM

This consent form is based on Guidelines from the National Statement on Ethical Conduct Involving Human Participants as issued by the NHMRC.

Name of Project: Institutional Preparation for Collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector

Researchers:

Supervisor: Dr Stuart Middleton
Director External Relations
Manukau Institute of Technology
0-9-9687692
stuart.middleton@manukau.ac.nz

Researcher: Donovan Wearing
Doctoral Student
Southern Cross University
0274 364 298
solutions.by.sands@xtra.co.nz

I have been provided with information about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, and possible outcomes of this research (including any likelihood and form of publication of results).

I agree to participate in the above research project. I have read and understand the details contained in the Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and I am satisfied with the answers received.

Either

☐ I agree to an interview and to my interview being recorded on audiotape.

Or

☐ I do not agree to my interview being audio-taped and prefer the researcher to take handwritten notes.

☐ I understand that if I withdraw from participation in this research, that any tapes or handwritten notes about my contribution will be destroyed.
Either

☐ I understand that participation in this research will be anonymous or confidential. (Delete which is not appropriate)

Or

☐ I understand that any personal information which may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Therefore, I, or information I have provided, cannot be linked to my person/or company. *(Privacy Act 1988 (Cth))*

☐ I understand that neither my name nor any identifying information will be disclosed or published.

☐ I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential. It is kept securely and confidentially for 5 years, at the University.

☐ I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time. I have been informed that prior to data analysis, any data that has been gathered before withdrawal of this consent will be destroyed.

☐ I am aware that I can contact the Supervisor or other researchers at any time with further inquiries, if necessary.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Approval Number is (Insert when approved)

*If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer:*

Ms Sue Kelly  
Ethics Complaints Officer and Secretary  
HREC  
Southern Cross University  
PO Box 157  
Lismore, NSW, 2480  
Telephone (02) 6626-9139 or fax (02) 6626-9145  
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

*All complaints, in the first instance, should be in writing to the above address. All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.*

☐ I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form for my records. The researcher will also keep a copy in safe storage at the University.
I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study. I am over the age of 18 years.

Name of Participant: ...........................................................................................................

Signature of Participant: ...................................................................................................

Date: ...................................................................................................................................

I certify that the terms of the Consent Form have been verbally explained to the participant and that the participant appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form. Proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where English is not the participant’s first language.

Name & Contact Detail of Witness: ......................................................................................

...........................................................................................................................................

Signature of Witness: ...........................................................................................................

Date: .........................................................................................

NOTE:
The witness should be independent of the research, where possible. If this is not possible at the place of consent, please inform the researcher and state a reason below.

Reason: ...................................................................................................................................

...........................................................................................................................................

...........................................................................................................................................

Name and signature of the researcher: ..................................................................................

...........................................................................................................................................

Date: ....................................................................................................................................
Interview guide

Thesis topic: An examination of institutional preparation for collaboration within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

Part A Introduction
Thank you for taking time to participate in this research.

Purpose of this research: While collaboration is an increasingly popular feature of tertiary institutional behaviour within the New Zealand tertiary education sector, little attention has focussed on how tertiary institutions can best prepare themselves to enhance the success of such collaborative activity.

In particular, this research aims to investigate how leaders within the New Zealand tertiary education sector view their respective institutions methods of collaborative preparation. That is, before any implementation of collaborative activity occurs and/or tangible and meaningful outputs can be identified and measured.

Four elements are focused upon, namely how institutions behave as they contemplate collaboration, the role of key protagonists, enablers and barriers to success, what does successful preparation look like. In addition, I am interested in your insights on how to replicate best practice across the sector.

Although there is a plethora of material in respect of collaborative activity outcomes, including multiple war stories of success and failure of mergers, alliances and the like, this area of research lacks empirical discussion of the ‘getting ready’ phase. In addition, this research area lacks the grounding of practical experience like yours.

Your participation would be invaluable in constructing a sound basis upon which a managerial best practice tool-kit could be formed. These guidelines would greatly assist New Zealand tertiary institutions embarking on inter-institutional collaborative activity.

Ethical considerations: You can be assured that all data collected in this interview will remain confidential and anonymous. In addition, for the safety and benefit of yourself, and your institution and its employees, I will disguise the name of your institution in my final research thesis to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, along with any other identifying details.
Could I please tape record this interview as it will assist me greatly with the data analysis? If you agree, please feel free to ask me to push the ‘pause’ button of the tape recorder at any time during the interview. Furthermore, you can terminate your involvement in this research at any time. Do you have any further questions regarding the objective or procedure of the interview? After the data analysis is completed I can provide you with a summary report of the findings if you wish.

This interview guide is not a questionnaire; rather it provides a framework for the interview.

**Part B**

Date: 
Time commenced: 
Name: 
Name of institution: 
Position: 
Years of involvement in institution: 
Years of involvement in sector: 
Time finished: 

The aim of this research is to investigate how leaders within the New Zealand tertiary education sector view their respective institutions methods of collaborative preparation. That is, before any implementation of collaborative activity occurs and/or tangible and meaningful outputs can be identified and measured. In addition, I am interested into your insight in how to replicate best practice across the sector. Four elements are focused upon, namely how institutions behave as they contemplate collaboration, the role of key protagonists, enablers and barriers to success, what does successful preparation look like. The following questions will be asked.

B1.1 I would like to begin the interview by asking you to share your experiences of how your institution readies itself of for inter-institutional collaborative activity?

B1.2 What is the role of key protagonist’s within the preparation phase of collaborative activity?

B1.3 What are the enabler’s and disenablers of preparation for collaborative activity?

B1.4 How does your institution behave during the collaborative preparation process?

B1.5 What are the successful attributes of best practice preparation for collaborative activity?

B1.6 How can best practice preparation for collaborative activity be incentivised from internal sources?

B1.7 How can best practice preparation for collaborative activity be incentivised from the other participating institutions?

B1.8 How can best practice preparation for collaborative activity be incentivised from external sources?

B1.9 How well does your institution replicate the success of previous collaboration preparation from one activity to another?
B1.10 How well does your institution replicate the failure of previous collaboration preparation from one activity to another?

B1.11 What key attributes would you like to see contained within a best practice managerial tool kit to enhance tertiary institutional readiness for successful collaborative activity?

B1.12 How does business as usual planning, support and/or detract for the institution’s preparation for collaborative activity?

B1.13 How would preparation for collaborative activity normally manifest itself within institution?

B1.14 From your perspective what would ‘best practice’ institutional collaboration look like?
Appendix 3.2  Example of a follow up email to arrange interview time

Donovan Wearing

To...
Cc...
Bcc...

Subject:  Doctoral Research interview
Attachments:

Hello

I trust all is well with you and

I am contacting you, following on from Stuart Middleton’s recent letter, to arrange a suitable time to conduct a one hour interview as part of my doctoral research.

If possible, could you please give me some potential interview dates during November and December as I’m trying to co-ordinate all my lower South Island interviews into one trip.

I really appreciate you making some of your valuable time available so I can conduct this research into how NZ tertiary institutions prepare for collaborative activity.

Kind regards, Donovan Wearing

PS I no longer work at the Open Polytechnic and have taken up the role as CEO of Taratahi - a vocational agricultural provider and 7000ha of commercially run farming activity based in the Wairarapa.
### Appendix 3.3  List of interview dates and details

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Appendix 3.4 An example of an early (grounded theory) memo: Collaborative algorithm

Source: Developed for this research and adapted from Yin and Oldman (1995)
Appendix 3.5  A later example of a memo: Leadership matrix for decision making

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Source: Developed for this research
### Appendix 4.1 Initial data analysis codes

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Source: Developed for this research
# Appendix 4.2 Final data analysis codes

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<td>Reluctant bride (RB)</td>
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<td>Not individual dependent (N)</td>
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<td>Open wide (O)</td>
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<td>Over promise (OP)</td>
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<td>Complexity of Maori (CX)</td>
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<td>Understanding (US)</td>
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<td>Starting point is important (SP)</td>
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<td>Unfolding (UF)</td>
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<td>Adventure (AD)</td>
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Source: Developed for this research
Appendix 4.3 An example of an initial memo created immediately after an interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happenstance</th>
<th>Good fences make good neighbours</th>
<th>Why do we need to worry about anyone else?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I hadn’t put it on the table…</td>
<td>Where you start</td>
<td>Make sure own house is in order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward and encourage</td>
<td>Doing things together is easier in smaller group</td>
<td>Hard enough to collaborate internally</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research
Appendix 4.4 An example of a subsequent memo derived from the memo in Appendix 4.3

Source: Developed for this research
Appendix 4.5 An example of an initial theoretical framework derived from data analysis

Business opportunity

- Institution management
  - Co-planning

- Stakeholder
  - Complimentary

Deliberate

- Coercion
  - External agency

Emergent

- Collaboration
  - Institution way of doing things

Philosophical orientation

Source: Developed for this research
### Appendix 5.1 Guidelines for practice – preparatory stage of collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Suggested activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Strategic position   | • What role does collaboration have in the institution’s strategic direction and business plan?  
                        | • Is this known and defined?                                                   | • Identify and define the role of collaboration in the institution’s strategic direction, including the desired contribution it can make to achieving set goals and outcomes.  
                        |                                                                            | • Where possible, involve managers and staff at other levels of the institution in this process. |
| 2. Organisational awareness | • Do staff throughout the institution know and understand the role of collaboration in the organisation’s direction and business plan?  
                        |                                                                            | • Ensure staff at as many levels in the institution as possible are aware of the role of collaboration in the institution’s strategic direction and day-to-day operations. |
| 3. Organisational attitude | • Is the institution predisposed to collaboration at as many levels as possible to allow collaborative activity to be effectively undertaken?  
                        | • Are staff at various levels in the institution encouraged to consider, suggest and undertake collaboration? | • Ensure staff at as many levels in the institution as possible are aware of the role of collaboration in the institutions strategic direction and day-to-day operations, and the contribution it can make to achieving strategic goals or addressing organisational threats or weaknesses.  
                        |                                                                            | • Actively encourage staff to identify and suggest opportunities for collaborative initiatives that could contribute to their area and/or the wider organisation. |
                        |                                                                            | • Involve staff in collaborative activities wherever possible and ensure they get recognised and acknowledged for their efforts and contribution to these activities. |
                        |                                                                            | • Provide feedback loops so staff can identify and highlight potential barriers to collaboration in their area.  
                        |                                                                            | • Ensure communications activities highlight the success stories from previous and existing collaborative initiatives so staff can see the real benefits these activities can provide. |

Source: Developed for this research
## Appendix 5.2 Guidelines for partner selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Existing relationship       | • Does your institution have an existing relationship with the institutions being considered?  
• What is the nature of this relationship? Is it conducive to entering a collaborative arrangement with the institution(s)?  
• What preparatory activities could be undertaken to strengthen the relationship before entering collaboration? |
| 2. Trust                       | • What is the level of trust between the potential partner institutions, and the key individuals involved in the initiative?  
• Is the existing level of trust sufficient to support a collaborative arrangement? |
| 3. Mutual interest             | • What is the motivation for each party to enter the collaborative arrangement?  
• Are the respective motivating factors aligned between the institutions or is there potential for these factors to be counter-productive or create issues in the future? |
| 4. Level of commitment         | • To what extent are the leaders or other key individuals of each potentially participating institution(s) committed to the collaborative arrangement?  
• Are the levels of commitment aligned or at least sufficient to support the effective implementation of the initiative? |
| 5. Similarity of culture and values | • How similar are the culture and operating values of the participating institutions?  
• Could any differences potentially undermine the success of the proposed initiative?  
• To what extent could any similarities in culture be problematic? |
| 6. Similarity of organisation  | • What is the relative difference in the types of participating institutions?  
• To what extent could differences in institution type be beneficial to the initiative?  
• To what extent could differences in institution type be problematic to the initiative? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Geographic location</td>
<td>• What are potential benefits associated with the geographic location of the participating institutions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the potential drawbacks associated with the geographic location of the participating institutions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Size</td>
<td>• What is the relative difference in size of the participating institutions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent could differences in size be beneficial to the initiative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent could differences in size be problematic to the initiative?</td>
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</table>

Source: Developed for this research
Appendix 5.3 Guidelines for collaborative opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Strategic fit    | • What is the defined role of collaboration for your institution?  
                      • How does the collaborative opportunity contribute to or ‘fit’ with this defined role or contribute to the institutions’ goals and/or future direction? |
| 2. Motivation       | • What is the motivation or rationale for entering into the collaborative arrangement?  
                      • What benefits does your institution hope to achieve from entering into the collaborative initiative?  
                      • What are the motivating factors for the other participating institution(s)? How do these align with your institution’s motivation for collaborating? Can any differences be accommodated within the proposed initiative? |
| 3. Institutional readiness | • How ‘organisationally ready’ is your institution to entering into this, or other, collaborative opportunities?  
                      • How well do staff throughout the institution understand the role of collaboration in terms of the institution’s goals and challenges?  
                      • How open or predisposed is the institution at all levels to collaboration?  
                      • How well resourced is the institution to enter into and undertake the collaborative opportunity? |
| 4. Partner relationships | • What is the nature of the existing relationships with the other participating institution(s)?  
                      • To what extent does the nature of these existing relationships potentially enable or disenable a proposed collaborative initiative?  
                      • What, if anything, could be done during the preparatory phase to enhance the existing relationships to make the collaborative initiative more likely to succeed? |
| 5. Institutional fit | • What is the level of institutional ‘fit’ between the proposed participating institutions?  
                      • To what degree could any differences be complementary to the proposed collaborative arrangement?  
                      • To what degree could any similarities be disenablers to the proposed collaborative initiative?  
                      • To what extent could differences in institution size, type or location cause potential issues during the collaborative initiative? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Level of commitment</td>
<td>• What is the level of commitment to the initiative from each of the participating institutions?</td>
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<td>• To what extent will any differences in commitment levels cause issues during the collaborative initiative?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Timeframe</td>
<td>• What is the proposed timeframe for the initiative? Is there common agreement between the participating parties about the timeframe for the initiative?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How does the timeframe fit with other planned initiatives for your institution?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Resources</td>
<td>• What resources will be required to undertake the collaborative initiative?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How will the required resources be met by the participating institutions?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If the participating institutions are contributing resources disproportionately, what are the institutions’ expectations about how any resulting benefits will be shared?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research