COLLABORATING WITH CLIENTS:

DEFINING THE BUSINESS MODEL FOR AN EDUCATION CONSULTING FIRM

Capstone Project

By

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This quality improvement study helped ED2WORK Solutions®, LLC (ED2WORK) refine its business model to create collaborative value for its clients. Founded in 2019, ED2WORK consults with education sector clients on the needs of working learners. A purpose-driven enterprise, ED2WORK aspires to build a consulting business that does more than generate profit through client engagements. ED2WORK aspires to partner collaboratively with its clients to develop and co-create ideas, models, and solutions for working learners. However, as a newer business, ED2WORK is still defining its business model's collaborative aspects. Left unaddressed, ED2WORK risks eroding its purpose-driven mission and under-leveraging its collaborative value on client engagements.

This study advanced ED2WORK's working knowledge of its problem of practice through (1) a literature review of leading studies on business models, value creation, and collaboration; (2) qualitative data collection among a purposive sample of ED2WORK's clients; and (3) a high-level presentation of findings and recommendations. To inform its analysis, the Collaborative Value Creation (CVC) framework was applied. This conceptual framework was developed by management theorists James Austin and Maria Seitanidi to describe the phenomena of collaboration within business and non-profit partnerships (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a).

The CVC framework has two components. Component one, the Value Creation Spectrum, defines four forms of value collaborations may create. First, collaborations may create associational value defined by the reputational enhancement and credibility that comes from the collaboration itself. Second, collaborations may create transferred resource value in which partners provide resources to one another collaboratively. Further along the spectrum, collaborations may create value based on the quality of interactions between partners and the levels of trust, transparency, and empathy defining the relationship. Finally, collaborations may create synergistic value from the combining of resources between organizations leading to innovation. Component two defines collaboration along a continuum of low to high-value influenced by collaboration drivers. Low-value collaborations are philanthropic, based on a one-way exchange of resources to another partner. Higher-level collaborations may become transactional or integrative as partners work more closely and synergistically together. The highest level of collaboration, transformational collaborations, occurs when partners build deep trust, emotional bonds, and shared priorities leading to co-creation. At what level a collaboration falls along this continuum may be influenced by alignment, engagement, and leverage drivers, which partners may employ to create higher collaborative value. For instance, knowledge sharing between partners can create an alignment that drives higher value. Deeper trust can foster engagement, strengthening interactions. The breadth of resources partners share creates leverage leading to co-creation. In any case,

One descriptive and exploratory theme guided this research: collaborative value as defined by ED2WORK's clients. The research method applied was qualitative and applied the CVC framework to develop three guiding questions to draw out client experiences collaborating with consultants:

1. How do organizations define value when working with consultants?
2. How can ED2WORK create collaborative value?
3. What barriers and enablers influence the impact of collaborative value creation?

Research questions were explored through 12 semi-structured interviews with a sample of ED2WORK's clients. They were developed using the CVC framework to draw out the phenomenon of collaboration between ED2WORK and its clients. Interview data provided an analytical basis to address ED2WORK's problem of practice and were gathered and analyzed from March to May 2021. The interviews helped identify how organizations define collaboration with consultants and motivations for collaborating, openness to collaboration, and experience with drivers of collaborative value. Based on the literature review and the structure provided by coding frameworks, interview data was mined for practical insights, frequently mentioned themes, and change ideas. This paper presents how ED2WORK's clients define the phenomena of collaboration based on analysis of the interviews and how interviewed clients experienced collaboration with consultants.

Interviews revealed that partnerships between consultants and clients create several types and levels of collaborative value. ED2WORK's clients define its collaborative value (component one) primarily based on the "transferred resource" of knowledge—e.g., subject matter expertise, research, data, experience—brought to consulting engagements. Thus, as consultants, ED2WORK's knowledge resources are the basis for its collaborative value. Knowledge resources, however, are dynamic and may be employed to create other value types. ED2WORK should lead with transferred-resource value while concurrently identifying strategies to create associational, interaction, and synergistic value over time. Interviews also revealed that knowledge is intertwined with value drivers (component 2) such as trust, communication, and transparency, which drive collaboration to higher levels. Nevertheless, clients largely described ED2WORK's collaborative value at a transactional level—i.e., beyond philanthropic but not integrative or transformational. While ED2WORK can create integrative or transformational value, it should not expect all collaborations to start this way. Notably, interviews revealed the presence of a promoter role within organizations that may impact the level of collaborative value ED2WORK can create at the start of an engagement and over time. These individuals recognize the value of working collaboratively with consultants. Promoters demonstrate a willingness to bring consultants to their organizations, familiarity with the logistics needed to help collaborative engagements succeed, and awareness of and appreciation for consultants that employ collaboration drivers. Thus, building relationships with promoters may be the key for ED2WORK to create higher levels of collaborative value.

In refining its business model, ED2WORK needs to consider several factors. Namely, it needs to create a structure that enables collaboration with clients through knowledge transfer leading to other value types. One suggestion is for leadership to take an active role in the initial knowledge transfer with clients and then employ collaboration drivers such as trust-building to create higher value. ED2WORK could also build trust initially with promoters and collaborate with them to oversee the evolution of an engagement to higher collaborative value. ED2WORK, however, should also consider whether lower levels of collaborative value still satisfy its clients and fulfill its purpose-driven mission. Expanding the company's capacity in this way introduces higher complexity and cost to the business and will require more from ED2WORK as engagements mature. ED2WORK should ensure they can move beyond a transactional level but be prepared to sustain—and scale—higher levels of collaborative value.

2. INTRODUCTION

Social, economic, and technological changes have made the education sector critical for training a 21st century workforce. Over the past decade, education organizations, from secondary and post-secondary institutions to workforce development agencies, have recognized the importance of partnering with outside organizations to envision, develop, and deploy new training models and methods. Partnering helps the organization remain effective and at the cutting edge of workforce demand in this changing environment. Partnerships involve agreements between two or more organizations to exchange resources and services with businesses, vendors, government agencies, and community groups. Partnerships may be for research and improvement (Coburn & Penuel, 2016), community advocacy and policymaking (Kezar & Lester, 2009, pp. 186–188), development of new programmatic offerings (Hazelkorn, 2019, p. 34), and scalability through technology platforms and third-party business services (Maxwell & Gallagher, 2020). To establish partnerships, organizations usually identify the purpose of partnerships and the problems partnerships will help solve. Throughout this process, organizations may operate from or develop a partnership strategy to govern outside relationships and maximize their value over time.

Organizations regularly use consultants when developing partnership strategies. Consultants may provide partnership identification, development, and relationship management services. Established management consulting firms, such as Mckinsey, Boston Consulting Group, and Deloitte, and education-specific firms, such as Ernst and Young's Parthenon Group, Tyton Partners, and the Education Advisory Board, offer partnership services. These firms, however, usually only provide a contracted service and rarely partner with clients in collaborative ways. A growing number of specialized consultancies aspire to create collaborative engagements and deepen conventional client and consultant relationships through knowledge and resource sharing and even co-creation. Firms such as the design consultancy IDEO, innovation strategy firm Entangled Solutions, and the Education Design Lab work collaboratively with clients. How to position collaborative consulting services, especially against larger firms, poses serious business model considerations for these consultancies, especially as they differentiate their services within the conventional client-consultant paradigm that has long defined the consulting industry.

3. CLIENT DESCRIPTION

This study assists a start-up consultancy, ED2WORK Solutions, LLC (ED2WORK), to refine its business model to establish its role as a collaborative partner to clients and create collaborative value through client relationships. Founded in 2019, ED2WORK consults with education sector clients on the needs of working learners. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, which studies working learners, defines this population as individuals who "earn while they learn," usually while pursuing postsecondary education or training while employed. The Georgetown Center further estimates that 14 million adults today (8% of the labor force) in the United States may be classified as working learners (Carnevale et al., 2015). Scholars have investigated environmental factors shaping opportunities for educational institutions to better meet the needs of working learners. A recent paper from Clark et al. (2018) analyzes working learners as a "new learning economy," describing an emerging ecosystem of technology-enabled learning solutions aligned to changing workforce demand. This new environment "provides an incubator for the explosive growth of new work-and-learn options where working learners develop their personalized work-and-learn pathways that lead to life satisfaction" (p. 26). Recognizing that education organizations often lack the expertise, experience, or capacity to operate in this environment, consultants have entered this space with services to help better meet the needs of working learners. Demand for these services fuels ED2WORK's business model. Operating in a multi-sector capacity, ED2WORK consults with a wide variety of education clients—colleges and universities, workforce development intermediaries, and advocacy groups—to address the needs of working learners, offering research and advisory, facilitation, integration, and workforce alignment services in many areas, such as online learning strategy, academic and workforce alignment, the future of work, and institutional change.

ED2WORK stands out among other consultancies for several reasons. First, the company does not just provide partnership strategy services. ED2WORK aspires to partner collaboratively with clients to develop and co-create ideas, models, and solutions for working learners. ED2WORK's leadership background and experiences bring unique expertise to its client engagements. The founder, Dr. Steven Taylor, previously served as Director for the Center for Education Attainment and Innovation at the American Council on Education and is a known thought leader in the education-to-workforce space. ED2WORK's Chief Strategy Officer, Dr. Marie Cini, previously served as the President of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and as Provost of University of Maryland's Global Campus, which during Cini's tenure grew exponentially through a distinct working learner strategy Cini helped create. Both leaders bring decades of combined expertise and a passion for addressing working learners' needs. They are well regarded by colleagues and clients alike, knowledgeable, and passionate about impact through and with their clients.

ED2WORK is a purpose-driven enterprise. The company exists to do more than generate profit. Purpose-driven enterprises (PDEs) have existed for decades. Still, they have emerged as a concept alongside various critiques of capitalism and efforts to recover capitalistic principles to harness the business community to deliver social good (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Hollensbe et al. (2014) describe PDEs as businesses that operationalize around profit and partnerships and exist to impact the common good. Consultancies such as Lapin, Better Future, and Genuinely work with clients in this manner. ED2WORK aspires to develop a similar model to these firms and initially does so through pro bono work and contributions to college programs providing direct student support.

ED2WORK is a knowledge consultancy. ED2WORK does not develop or endorse specific technologies, approaches, or solutions. The company is product, program, and platform agnostic and exists solely to partner with clients to navigate and tailor solutions and strategies specific to each client's problems and opportunities. ED2WORK studies new educational models to offer advisory and strategic planning and change management support for its clients. Beyond consulting deliverables, it has produced several publicly available reports and white papers on topics such as competency-based education, digital workplace skills, and alternative credentials. In 2020, ED2WORK developed the ED2WORK Impact Model™ to define its approach and scope of client engagements (see figure 1). As described on its website, ED2WORK "discovers and builds upon the community's strengths to create lasting and sustainable change." ED2WORK aspires to partner with clients across all aspects of this model, especially to mobilize and cultivate phases that envision a collaborative client and consultant relationship.

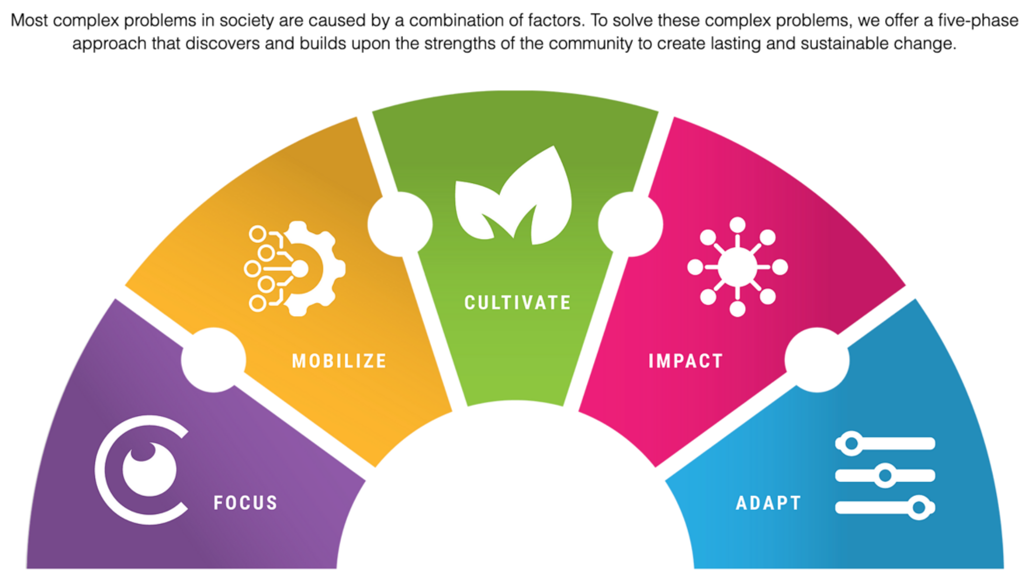

Figure 1: ED2WORK Impact Model™

4. PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

ED2WORK is a start-up still defining its business model with wide aspirations but only two full-time employees and a small team of project-based consultants. The company has served seven clients to date, including a private university and a public university system, a professional association, a regional civic alliance, an education nonprofit, and two workforce agencies with post-secondary education alignment initiatives. Although ED2WORK aspires to deliver collaborative value, it has yet to define or leverage this service with its clients fully. These dynamics inform ED2WORK's problem of practice.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) defines a problem of practice as "a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes" (CPED, 2010). A problem of practice is complex but addressable through a comprehensive research plan developed through an actionable and pragmatic review of the literature on the problem and an appropriate primary research methodology (Perry et al., 2020, pp. 54–56). Research on a problem of practice generally does not identify gaps in scholarly literature, nor have audience members of the academic community. Instead, it harnesses the literature and primary data to inform practice, and the practitioner—the client—is its audience.

This study explored a "persistent" issue related to ED2WORK's business model. ED2WORK's leadership wants to move from transactional value to collaborative relationships with clients. Since 2019, while generating a steady stream of interest in its services—and revenue through client engagements to grow the business—ED2WORK's interactions with clients have been highly operational. A recent engagement clarified this problem. ED2WORK worked with a regional education and workforce development intermediary to support a federal grant application to develop an upskilling marketplace solution. While ED2WORK provided high-level opportunity evaluation and technical expertise in building a skills-based education model, most of the work revolved around project managing the grant process. Few interactions with the client over the engagement occurred, no mutually beneficial relationships formed, and no opportunity to co-create the solution arose. Although a successful final product was delivered to the client, the engagement felt like "outsourced research," leaving no room for collaborative experiences.

In early 2020, ED2WORK began to consider how better to position its services as delivering collaborative value. Initial conversations with ED2WORK for this study revealed the origins of this request. ED2WORK shared concerns about its current business structure, which requires the firm to generate profit as a limited liability company. ED2WORK described feeling constrained by its profit motive when working with non-profit clients and as a PDE. Thus, ED2WORK's leadership asked whether it should convert the company to a social enterprise or even a non-profit. Furthermore, ED2WORK shared that as a knowledge consultancy, its greatest "product" was the quality of its client relationships. The question was how ED2WORK could cultivate a business model that draws out its collaborative value. Further discussion revealed a need to understand the phenomena of collaboration itself, how it works, and how ED2WORK's clients have experienced collaborating with consultants in the past. The results of this study may help ED2WORK refine its business model. While ED2WORK discussed the possibility of collaboration with prospective clients, it has not captured, in an objective, research-based approach, how clients perceive of collaboration with consultants nor determined how ED2WORK should approach this service. Since ED2WORK cannot conduct such a study as a startup, it was interested in partnering on this study. ED2WORK aims to better understand business model development, define its collaborative value, develop this service, and ultimately improve its business and client outcomes. This study offers the first step toward broader business model considerations, such as structuring ED2WORK as a PDE. While it does not address questions about ED2WORK's governance or legal structure, this study's findings may be useful for addressing these decisions.

5. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

An important objective of this study was to assist ED2WORK in developing a collaborative business model to provide practical insights into this particular business to ensure successful collaboration. The study's findings provide a foundation for ED2WORK's approach to partnership development through new decision tools and skills development strategies to define and drive collaborative engagements over time. This study advanced ED2WORK's working knowledge of partnering, collaborating, and creating collaborative value through a literature review and analysis of interviews conducted with a purposive sample of ED2WORK's clients. The approach was to situate ED2WORK's problem of practice within an evidence base and translate evidence into methods that solve organizational problems (Rousseau (2006, p. 256). One descriptive and exploratory theme guided this research: collaborative value as determined by ED2WORK's clients. Drawing on several decades of scholarly research on business models, resource-dependence theory (RDT) provides the theoretical lens to analyze ED2WORK's problem of practice—specifically, an applied RDT conceptual model for collaborative value creation (CVC) developed over several decades of empirical research by Austin and Seitanidi (2012b, 2014). This research had three guiding questions:

1. How do organizations define value when working with consultants?
2. How can ED2WORK create collaborative value?
3. What barriers and enablers influence the impact of collaborative value creation?

Between November 2020 and February 2021, the CVC framework provided the protocol for semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 12 ED2WORK clients. While findings are limited to ED2WORK's problem of practice and not generalizable, they may help aid other consultancies and PDEs pursuing collaborative value and may also provide insights into the concept of partnering in general, which is common within the education sector to achieve or extend value through the combined resources of two or more organizations. For descriptive purposes and to help readers understand this research, this study includes, where appropriate, summary tables of key terms, concepts, quotes, and findings to help illuminate critical findings (Miles et al., 2020, p. 324).

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Because the purpose of this study was to advance ED2WORK's working knowledge of collaborative value, the initial literature review process began by identifying key themes and topics to help “name and frame” ED2WORK's problem of practice (Perry et al., 2020, p. 77). The literature review began with multiple searchers using Google Scholar and Vanderbilt's internal library databases. Search terms used included “business models,” “collaboration,” “consulting,” and “purpose-driven enterprises,” followed by theories such as the resource-based view of a firm, resource-exchange, and resource-dependence theory (RDT).

This study identified definitions and characteristics of a business model and explained how a business model may create collaborative value, as well as investigating how to situate a business model within a start-up firm and PDE. Findings from this literature are divided into three sections: (1) business models, (2) value creation, and (3) collaboration. Drawing from RDT as a theoretical perspective to analyze ED2WORK's problem of practice, this study applied the resource-dependence concept CVC, developed by James Austin and Maria May Seitanidi. This concept has been widely used to describe defining characteristics and dynamics of business and non-profit collaborations, offers a useful conceptual lens to address how to create collaborative value, and informed this study’s qualitative research component.

Business Models

Business models have been widely studied in scholarly literature. Research on the topic first emerged in the 1990s alongside growing interest in corporate strategy, management practices, and innovation (Zott et al., 2011). When appropriate, this study limited direct applications of research to studies published from 2005 and beyond. Business model research occurs mostly within management disciplines with a growing emphasis on a business's role in creating social impact, which led to social entrepreneurship and innovation research. Recently, studies have examined dynamic models and networked approaches such as partnerships and collaborations. For this research, several research studies informed ED2WORK's practice and research questions, which concern business models that create collaborative value.

Business models originate from a longstanding debate between economist Milton Freidman (1912-2006) and management theorist Peter Drucker (1909-2005) about the purpose of a business. On the one hand, Freidman (1970) argued that a business's purpose was to increase profit. On the other hand, Drucker proposed that its purpose was to “create a customer” (Drucker, 1974, p. 64). Both theorists set the tone for decades of subsequent research on the purpose of a business and, as described by later scholars and practitioners, the business model. Noted management scholars, such as Michael Sandel and Clayton Christenson, have widely studied the theory and practice connected to business models.

Despite the volume of scholarly studies on the topic, the business model concept continues to evolve, but it is not always well defined. Massa et al. (2017), in surveying hundreds of scholarly papers since the 1990s, found little consensus among scholars despite several frameworks and empirical applications of the concept. Fundamentally, a business model is “a description of an organization and how that organization functions in achieving its goals” (p. 73). A business model includes a vision and mission (why it exists, what it aspires to do), information on its purpose and stakeholders, and its activities and initiatives. Every business has a business model, whether clearly stated or just understood. A business model may vary by the business's focus, industry, priorities, size, and other contextual factors. The primary factor defining a business model is how a business generates returns. A company may exist to make money (Afuah, 2004) or as a social venture (Byerly, 2014; Seelos & Mair, 2007). A business model may be in its early stages and entrepreneurial (Zott & Amit, 2007) or may exist within a network of businesses that together strive to create value (Dyer et al., 2018). These models may even exist simply as a mechanism to enable a business to explore or create a market (Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009). Business models have been widely examined across hundreds of contexts, yielding several vital findings that informed this study. For example, Zott and Amit (2007) proposed a definition of business model design for entrepreneurial firms. Their research defines a business model as the content, structure, and governance of transactions designed to create value by exploiting business opportunities. They found that entrepreneurial firms generally defined their models based on novelty, on the one hand, and efficiency, on the other. To define their business models, entrepreneurial firms need to strike an appropriate balance between these competing forces (i.e., between the value they aspire to create and the value they can reasonably expect to create based on the size, experience, and investment capital; p. 194). In essence, Zott and Amit (2007) suggest that a business model needs to factor in this tension when considering the content, structure, and governance of an entrepreneurial business.

A business model may function in several ways. Massa et al. (2017) found three functions of business models through their survey of the literature: (1) a model of actual firms' attributes; (2) a set of cognitive/linguistic schemas; (3) a formal, conceptual representation of a business, such as a strategic plan. From an attributes perspective, a business model is an empirical, rather than conceptual, description of a business (p. 76). The model describes the business in real, measurable terms, including its performance and how it adds value to its stakeholders. Attributes stem from the evidence and are tangible. They are also most common among established businesses. Business models functioning as cognitive/linguistic schemas differ significantly from attributes and may have more in common with entrepreneurial or emerging business contexts. Schemas exist as mental models and images of what the business does. They are not always evidence-based but rather narratives that define or motivate a business. Schemas may also be aspirational, such as how a business intends to add value or how others, such as its customers, believe it adds value (pp. 80-84). Formal, conceptual representations differ from schemas to conceptualize the business model in a written document, such as a strategic plan. Representations include evidence and schemas and may inform the aspects of a business responsible for its strategy. For instance, emphasizing the business's logic (e.g., how a firm theoretically delivers value based on goals and metrics) helps management describe and capture key business objectives and performance measures (pp. 84-88).

How a business model defines and operationalizes around the customer can determine how it adds value. Byerly (2014) defines customers as individuals, organizations, and society overall, and the business model as an “evolving social contract” (p. 330). Scholars have examined the complex nature of defining the customer for entrepreneurial business as well as PDEs. Purpose-drive enterprises almost always operate from a social perspective (Quinn & Thakor, 2019) and are designed to navigate the tensions that arise from working in complex customer environments (Mitra & Fyke, 2017). Furthermore, PDEs build capabilities not only to address social needs but to operate in social settings. Zott and Amit (2007) point out that while entrepreneurial businesses may quickly identify customer targets and generate customer interest with their novelty, they need to adopt efficiency measures to ensure their sustainability within the business environment over time. Seelos and Mair (2007) argue that while social businesses that addresses social needs must be adaptive and evolutional at all stages of maturity to remain relevant, they may benefit from maturity as they build an infrastructure to drive scale and efficiency (p. 61).

Scholars have explored how to define a business model at different levels of business maturity. Generally, established businesses operate from models other than entrepreneurial businesses or start-ups. Because ED2WORK is a start-up, this study focused on entrepreneurial business models and their characteristics. The literature provides several insights into defining and characterizing entrepreneurial business models. First, the model's design and intent should be creative and constructive. Because the business is new, its model should not yet be fully defined. An iterative and evolving model benefits the business, which, in the early phase, has yet to address all aspects of a model. Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) conceptualize entrepreneurial business models as facilitating an experimental approach to defining a business and its market as well as its operating characteristics (Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009). An entrepreneurial business model is a formative and performative aspect in nature and should function as a "flexible mix of narratives and calculations" (p. 1560) that allows the new business to adapt.

Drawing on Massa et al.'s (2017) research on the three functions of a business model (2017), an entrepreneurial business model should include cognitive/linguistic schemas and attributes but may wish to avoid initial representations at least until it has evolved. The more established a business, the more it may favor attributes over schemas and need representations to codify its model. An entrepreneurial business model, however, should operate from a position of constraint. Zott and Amit (2007) suggest defining a business model at its current stage (using calculations) so that it can set targets it can reasonably accomplish (p. 183). However, the business should be guided by its narrative and not lose sight of its broader vision, which may be well supported by defining the value it aspires to create.

Value Creation

How a business creates value is the defining attribute of its business model (Bigelow & Barney, 2020, pp. 529–530). Business model research often refers to a business's value proposition, a focal point for defining what a business does and what it achieves for whom and to what end. Scholars have widely investigated the concept of value and its evolution over time. Four forms of value were studied in this research (see Table 1).

Value Created…	Description	Sources
For the Business	• Value defined at an organizational level • Supply-sided	• Afuah (2004)
For the Customer	• Value defined for the customer • Demand-sided	• Bowman & Ambrosini (2000) • Drucker (1974) • Smith & Colgate (2007)
Dynamically	• Contextual • Supply- and demand-side achieved through equilibrium • Transformation and adaptability to market forces occur over time (business model innovation) • Social orientation possible	• Achtenhagen et al. (2013) • Byerly (2014) • Joyce & Paquin (2016) Osterwalder et al. (2014) • Seelos and Mair (2007) • Teece (2018)
Through Networks and Partnerships	• Value created at an interorganizational level • The power of relationships, partnerships, and collaborations achieve value • Social orientation usual	• Austin (2010) • Austin and Seitanidi (2012b, 2014) • Dyer et al. (2018) • Palo & Tähtinen (2013) • Wenger, Trayner, and De Laat (2011) • Zaheer & Bell (2005)

Table 1: Summary of Perspectives on Value Creation

The value created for the business itself exists as profits, returns, and growth and is entirely supply-sided (Massa et al., 2017, p. 75). Supply-sided value reflects the traditional logic of business, which, according to Friedman, creates returns for business stakeholders, namely profits and an improved competitive position in a market (Afuah, 2004, p. 2). The value created for the business's customers is demand-sided and, following Drucker, is measured in returns for the customer (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Smith & Colgate, 2007; Tynan et al., 2014). Based on several decades of demand-sided research, Smith and Colgate (2007) describe customer value as having four subjective possibilities: (1) functional/instrumental value, which includes outcomes, experiences, and use-cases created by the business for its customers; (2) symbolic/expressive value, which provides for personal and social meaning, status, and esteem derived from a business; (3) experiential/hedonic value, such as sensory experiences, enjoyment, or solidarity; and (4) cost/sacrifice value, such as opportunity costs and risk (p. 9). From either side, value creation defines the business and creates value streams and chains that lock the business into either approach. Over time, market-driven value creates a business culture that can lock it into one stream, especially as it matures and becomes more established.

In contrast to supply- and demand-side perspectives, scholars have explored more dynamic approaches to a value expressed as both a supply- and demand-side phenomena (Teece, 2018). A growing consensus in the literature is that a business model in practice is far too complex to reduce to any one perspective and should provide a basis for the business to adapt over time (Massa et al., 2017). Thus, dynamic business models tend to be fluid and adaptive, primarily oriented toward the business but able to facilitate an interplay of supply- and demand-side value. Dynamic business models create value through equilibrium, prompting a business to define itself not just as it is or how it makes value but as what it is becoming (Achtenhagen et al., n.d., p. 428). Teece (2018), in his dynamic capability framework, proposes a business model framework with the business as always in a state of transformation through sensing new opportunities and seizing resources for value creation (p. 45). Mitigated through equilibrium, dynamic perspectives orient a business toward innovation, improvement, and change. Dynamic perspectives call for investment in innovation activities, namely through the possibilities and affordances of technology to create customer value while controlling costs through competitive strategies and efficiencies. Business model innovation (BMI) facilitates these activities. Developed in the literature as a process of learning, adaptation, and growth, BMI ensures a business transforms over time (Teece, 2018, p. 43). Scholarly research on BMI has increased significantly over the past decade. Foss and Saebi (2017) reviewed 150 peer-reviewed articles on BMI published between 2000 and 2015 and found that BMI has been conceptualized as an evolutionary description of the business model concept (pp. 202-203). Furthermore, BMI may be synonymous with the business model concept or may make the concept more concrete and actionable (p. 202). A growing body of research has offered design and strategy techniques to engage in BMI. The popular business model canvas technique provides several analytical tools and practices for defining, and refining, a business model (Joyce & Paquin, 2016; Osterwalder et al., 2014). While not entirely validated in empirical research, the business model canvas is a valuable tool for identifying a business model's components and exploring their synergies.

Building on dynamic perspectives, a recent development in business model research has explored networked business models, which create value interactivity at an interorganizational level. Scholars have characterized mainly networks as a necessary, even inevitable, evolution of the business model concept. Every business, knowingly or not, exists in a network and creates value through networked participation. Networked business models are dynamic to facilitate BMI through relationships with external parties, partnerships, and collaborations. Networks may even allow a business to co-create solutions to address customer needs and perhaps gain a competitive advantage by exchanging resources (Suchman, 1995). Dyer et al. (2018) define a networked business model as “a representation of a firm's underlying core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value within a value network.” Networked business models are governed by choice—a business usually chooses to engage in a network—but optimized by the value created, which makes identifying and defining the scope of networked relationships and ensuring productivity in them paramount. Scholars have provided several foundations for creating networked value. For example, a business model should be more than dynamic or even adaptive; it should be performative (Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009, p. 1560). A business should actively scope its role in the network and create value through, as a member of, and for the network. Wenger, Trayner, and De Laat (2011) describe a network as a community of practice and express five possibilities for value creation through this type of arrangement. First, the business may create immediate value through activities that generate value at the moment of entry or even through the action itself if the business possesses a unique set of resources, such as a solid brand or capabilities. Second, the business may create potential value, realized later through knowledge gained and resources exchanged within the network over time. Third, the business may create applied value, which signifies a change in practice for the network when the business enters. Fourth, the business may improve the performance of the practice itself based on the business's presence, and fifth, the business may redefine success, which signifies a change in strategy or trajectory for the network once the business enters (pp. 23-23).

Several scholars have also examined network positing and the relative advantages or disadvantages of networked value creation. Zaheer and Bell (2005), through research among a network of financial firms, found that a strong position in the network (e.g., driven by immediate value) bolstered immediate ties to resources, relationships, and innovation. Over time, however, this position may be constrained by distractions from the business's performance and other internal priorities (pp. 820-822). In essence, networked business models, despite their benefits and inevitabilities, have the potential to consume a business; otherwise, the business itself would become the network and cease to add value on its own. To mitigate these challenges, BMI (or a similar process) should facilitate a loop back to the business to improve its learning processes, positioning, and value.

A significant transformation in many business sectors, including education, is creating networked value through partnerships, such as interorganizational collaborations, strategic alliances, and joint ventures. These partnerships are a defining characteristic of networked business models (Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018). Partnerships represent a formal arrangement between organizations for specific purposes and may be enhanced by collaboration. In today's complex business environment, the ability to partner may be fueled by the affordances of distributed technology (Palo & Tähtinen, 2013, p. 775). Recent research has explored collaboration within networked contexts, such as open innovation, the sharing economy, and businesses as platforms, all of which promise growth and sustainability for businesses capable of engaging in these ways (Zaheer & Bell, 2005; Zott et al., 2011, p. 1033). In education, Coburn and Penuel (2016) explored the concept of research-practice partnerships, typically to address a problem of practice, drawing attention to principles and practices that fuel successful partnerships, including the ability to collaborate across organizations (pp. 49-52). Collaborations are a common practice within partnerships, especially when addressing social problems, but are fraught with challenges, setbacks, and questionable outcomes (pp. 49-50). Collaboration is particularly challenging between businesses and non-profit organizations, including education institutions, which may be suspicious of consultancies with for-profit motives. Scholars have increasingly examined this problem from a business model perspective, proposing principles and practices to mitigate these challenges through better descriptive and analytical frameworks to define collaboration and the scope of collaborative partnerships (Austin, 2010).

Collaboration

Collaboration can occur in networks and through partnerships. Scholars have widely examined collaboration within the business model concept. Collaboration, which means to "co-labor" or "work together," originates from collective action and advocacy (Galaskiewicz, 1985), as well as from within the service economy, and more recently, shared services and co-creation scenarios (Roels et al., 2010, p. 850). Several definitions of collaboration exist in the literature. Pioneering the study of collaboration in business, Gray (1998) defines it as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their limited vision of what is possible" (p. 470). There are different ways for businesses to collaborate and form collaborative relationships. Surveying characteristics of collaboration in the literature, Castañer and Oliveira (2020) argue that collaboration may be defined in business as a set of attitudes governing relationships, behaviors needed to achieve a collaborative goal, or outcome (pp. 979-980). A company may collaborate by simply having a collaborative approach, being a valued collaborator, or playing a part in helping collaborators achieve a goal. Collaboration, however, requires organizations actively define the scope of collaborative relationships. Businesses may have different motivations for collaborating. Le Pennec and Raufflet (2018) explored the value of collaboration as image-based (e.g., a company wants to be seen as collaborative) or driven by a need for knowledge and resource transfer to create value (p. 819).

While scholars generally agree that collaboration can create value, the threat of diminished value throughout a collaboration has prompted numerous studies. Hardy et al. (2003) emphasize the ongoing negotiated nature of cooperation and the need for an "ongoing communicative process" between collaborators to create and sustain value (p. 323). Collaboration requires substance and maintenance to nurture and drive relationships over time. Dyer et al. (2018) identified factors influencing diminished value creation in collaborative contexts, including internal factors, such as resource imbalances and poor relationships, and external factors, such as competition from other collaborations and unforeseen events in the environment (p. 3143). To mitigate these barriers, collaboration generally requires a business model that is networked in nature, even when the business must identify its intentions for the collaboration, assumptions about itself and its collaborators, and goals and objectives.

Consulting businesses may take part in, or drive, interorganizational collaborations. Collaboration has become an essential aspect of the evolving consulting business model, however, in defining the scope of a consultants' contribution to a client. Grossmann et al. (2014), exploring the changing paradigm of consulting through an exhaustive volume on the future of the industry, argue that in collaborations, consultants play several vital roles, such as "independent third part[ies]…dedicated to the new cooperative system," "solicitors of the newly found system," and "bridge builders between the different organizations" involved in collaboration, as well as through practical interorganizational knowledge (pp. 252-253). Purpose-driven consultancies extend these roles into more integrated forms of client-consultant co-creation. Mitra and Fyke (2011) characterize purpose-driven consultancies as driven by networked collaboration, with consultants as facilitators and clients as stakeholders. Purpose-driven consultancies implement highly relational approaches to their work with clients rather than top-down solutions and often blur boundaries between themselves and the client (pp. 141-142).

Despite the necessity or virtues of collaboration between clients and consults, scholars have identified several barriers to cooperation that may exist within this business model. Block (2011) calls attention to three roles consultants play when working with other organizations: consultants may be hired as experts in a discipline or field, as extra hands to augment capabilities, or as collaborators on a project or initiative (pp. 22-26). While all roles may bring value to other organizations, collaboration is the least transactional of the three and usually permits deeper engagement between consultant and client. Collaboration may involve sustained interactions, resource sharing, and even co-creation but could be the most complex role for a consultant to play if not correctly managed (pp. 26-29). Challenges may arise throughout the collaboration if the client lacks experience in collaborative methods or the willingness to collaborate. Challenges may also occur based on assumptions about the nature of consulting itself. Werr and Styhre (2002) note the inherently ambiguous nature of client-consultant relationships. Clients may make assumptions about consultants' motives or be defensive about opening their organizations up to outside influence (pp. 40-49). Clients may also choose to collaborate with consultants for adverse reasons, such as to legitimize a decision or as scapegoats (Sturdy, 2011, p. 523).

Calling attention to the challenges of information asymmetry, role and relationships, and moral hazard, the scope of a collaboration should be based on the nature of its goal, or output, and its relative impact on collaborative parties. The key, their research suggests, is to control for output uncertainty at the entity phases of the collaboration (pp. 858-859). If uncertainty is higher for the consultant, collaboration may be supported through a fixed fee contract; if it is higher for the client, payment by time and effort may be suitable. When the output is uncertain for both, a performance-based contract may be appropriate (p. 861).

7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of collaborative value describes the nature and extent of value created through partnerships. While not limited to partnerships for societal outcomes, the concept has been widely developed from this lens. The scholarly work of management theorists James Austin and Maria Seitanidi defined this concept over two decades of research, describing value creation through business and non-profit partnerships as being driven by social problems and causes executed through corporate social responsibility initiatives, social entrepreneurship, or engagements between a business and non-profit in which both wish to co-create social value in some way. Understanding collaborative value and its potential through partnering stems from three questions defined by Austin's (2000) earlier work: partners should ask, “where are we, where do we want to go, and how do we get there” (p. 34).

Collaborative value is a directional concept describing the nature of collaboration, motivations for collaboration, and collaboration along stages of maturity. This concept also functions as a starting point for identifying partners’ relative positions in collaboration (e.g., what type of organizations are represented), the goals of the collaboration, and the drivers of collaborative value, which at their fullest potential include large-scale societal benefits. The collaborative value may manifest in degrees of collaboration or occur in stages and lesser or greater values. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) define collaboration as “the transitory and enduring benefits relative to the costs generated due to the interaction of the collaborators, and that accrue to organizations, individuals, and society” (p. 728). In other words, collaborative value is created when the outcomes exceed the costs of collaboration. Collaborative value is transitory, temporal, and bounded to a particular arrangement, need, or cause. The concept also assumes that organizations remain distinct and do not merge in any way. Otherwise, they would cease to collaborate. Collaborative value is durable, potentially producing lasting outcomes beyond the collaboration or organizations themselves. Moreover, it may generate returns that exceed the costs of collaboration, such as the financial burden of collaborating, the capacities needed to cooperate, the time it takes to collaborate, and the risks of the collaboration failing. Over time, the collaborative value may accrue benefits that justify the collaboration, usually based on realizing a vital goal. In any case, engaging in this method of collaboration requires a mindset that "thinks of resources not as expenses but as investments that will generate returns in multiple forms of value over a longer timeframe" (Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018). In other words, collaborations occur when both parties emphasize value created over costs.

Empirical research on collaborative value, conducted in over 100 business settings, has helped develop a multi-part framework and analytical tool to define the scope of collaborative relationships (e.g., interorganizational collaborations, alliances, joint ventures between non-profits and businesses). The CVC framework has been widely applied in business to describe collaborative arrangements and potential outcomes (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, p. 728). The framework may be applied across different business contexts and arrangements with the only parameter for using the framework being the presence of a business and non-profit partner. Additionally, the framework assumes a motivation to create value through collaboration as co-creation to extend social reach. While Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) never applied the CVC framework within consulting, they invite practitioners to synthesize, challenge, and apply it within different collaboration contexts. As this study considered CVC and its applications across contexts, CVC was open-ended enough to permit some flexibility in how it was applied and was readily adapted to this specific study given ED2WORK's work with non-profits (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, pp. 744-745).

The CVC framework describes concepts, characteristics, forms, expressions, and degrees of collaboration. This study applied two components described by Austin and Seitanidi (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, 2012a, 2014) to help ED2WORK identify possibilities for collaboration, position its services collaboratively, and determine the value it expects to create from its clients.

Component 1: Value Creation Spectrum

Component 1 (see Table 2), the value creation spectrum, describes four types of collaborative value that may be created within a partnership: associational, transferred resource, interaction, and synergistic (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, pp. 729–731). This component is descriptive. First, collaborations may create associational value defined by the reputational enhancement and credibility that comes from the collaboration itself. Second, collaborations may create transferred resource value in which partners provide resources to one another collaboratively. Further along the spectrum, collaborations may create value based on the quality of interactions between partners and the levels of trust, transparency, and empathy defining the relationship. Finally, collaborations may create synergistic value from the combining of resources between organizations leading to innovation.

Value types may provide an equal ability to create collaborative value. Value types can, however, evolve. Austin and Seitanidi (2014) describe “relational capital” that can arise and deepen collaboration as partners develop a deeper emotional connection, trust, and involvement. Value types are not mutually exclusive, as several value types may be present within a partnership. For instance, a partnership defined by associational and interactional values may lack synergistic elements but still be collaborative. A partnership may also be entirely driven by transferred resource value with no other value type present and still be collaborative. In all cases, value types help identify the value defining a partnership. Value types may be identified based on characteristics that help partners better analyze the value of partnerships and their unique role in defining them. Furthermore, they help define a partner’s preferred approach to creating collaborative value over time. For example, a collaborating organization may, from this component, determine its value is largely associational and choose to define its business model based on characteristics such as a reputational enhancement for partners, credibility, or affinities.

Value Types	Definitions	Characteristics (Selected)
Associational	"The derived benefit accruing to another partner simply from having a collaborative relationship with the other organization" (p. 731)	• Reputational enhancement • Credibility (e.g., from expertise) • Desirability • Affinity for partner
Transferred Resource	"The benefit derived by a partner from the receipt of a resource from the other partner" (p. 731)	• Depreciable assets ($) • Durable assets (resources, expertise) • Renewable assets (resources that add ongoing value)
Interaction	"The intangibles that derive from the processes of partners working together" (p. 731)	• Relationships • Empathy • Trust building • Joint problem solving • Conflict resolution
Synergistic	"Arises from the underlying premise of all collaborations that combining partners' resources enable them to accomplish more together than they could have separately" (p. 731)	• Creation of a virtuous circle that adds continuous value during and after the collaboration • Synergistic resource combinations • Innovative solutions • Synergistic process and pathways

Table 2: CVC Component 1, Value Creation Spectrum (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b)

<u>Component 2: Collaborative Value Drivers</u>

Component 2, collaboration stages, offers a directional set of concepts and characteristics. This component is directional and intended to identify current and potential drivers and stages of collaboration. Austin and Seitanidi (2014) define drivers as forces that propel a collaboration toward higher levels when present (pp. 123-124). Stages describe the magnitude of drivers creating collaborative value and range from a one-directional exchange, which is low value in terms of the nature of the partnerships, to synergistic exchange, which is high value. Synergistic exchanges may yield collaborative value not only for partners but also for society.

Drivers are conceptual, interrelated, and not intended to be analyzed in any particular order. In addition, drivers describe value-enhancing dynamics that further define a value but can also drive it to a higher level when applied (Austin & Seitanidi, 2014, p. 124). The CVC framework defines three drivers: alignment, engagement, and leverage (see Table 3). Alignment describes areas where organizations find similarities in their mission, determine their collaborative value, and discover how they collectively frame value. Alignment drivers are usually determined before collaboration but are magnified to drive high levels of collaboration. Engagement drivers describe aspects of the collaboration itself and drive higher collaboration levels when harnessed. For instance, partners may form a stronger emotional connection during an engagement, leading to higher quality and more frequent interactions that build trust. As a result, the collaboration achieves a higher value. Leverage drivers address the magnitude of resources brought to the partnerships, synergism between organizations, the extent of innovation that has occurred, and whether the collaboration led to any external change beyond the partner organizations. As with alignment and engagement drivers, leverage drivers, when identified, can assign low or high value to the partnership.

CV Drivers	**Examples (selected)**
Alignment	• Missions are aligned/complimentary • The strategic importance of the collaboration is magnified by a problem or opportunity • Values are explicit and aligned
Engagement	• Partners make an emotional connection • Interaction quality is high • Interactions are consistent and frequent • Trust between organizations is high
Leverage	• The magnitude of resources exchanged is high • Synergism exists • Innovation occurs • External change is evident/observed

Table 3: CVC Framework Component 2, Description of CV Drivers (Austin & Seitanidi, 2014)

Drivers push a partnership along a continuum of four stages: philanthropic collaborations, which may be collaborative but of lower value; transactional collaborations; integrative collaborations; and transformational collaborations, which are the most collaborative and of the highest value. Positioning along this continuum is generally mediated by the intensity of drivers within a partnership. From an RDT perspective, this intensity is defined by the extent of resources deployed, the directionality of resource flow, and synergisms created (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, p. 742). Table 4 presents key details about each stage.

Low Value		→	**High Value**
Philanthropic	**Transactional**	**Integrative**	**Transformational**
• Unilateral flow of resources from business to non-profit; usually financial but may be donated time, expertise, and capacity. • Sole creation by the non-profit supported; business not associated with value created. • Relatively simple to administer and time-bound.	• Bilateral exchange with a scope of resources intensified by allocation of time, expertise, and capacity • Business and non-profit work together more actively • More complex and less time-bound, distinctions between organizations begin to erode.	• Multilateral exchange with a high scope of resources and intensified by relationships and capacity • Business and non-profit work together, usually leading to shared action, integration, and perhaps some co-creative elements.	• Most advanced and collaborative stage; seamless exchange with a significant scope of resources. • Business and non-profit mutually co-create CV. • Platform effect capable of addressing social issues through combined resources.

Table 4: Collaboration Continuum (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, 2014)

Collaborative value may be created through each of these stages. Nevertheless, the CVC framework does not assume that later stages are more or less important. For instance, some collaborations may not intend to create social value through partnering. While the framework also does not explicitly address client-consultant relationships or the consulting business model directly, it has cross-sector applicability, which helps this study because of its focus on purpose-driven business motives and non-profit collaborations.

In addition to its descriptive possibilities, the CVC framework helps position partnerships along this continuum by observing drivers and characteristics, which can be mapped to different stages through data gathering, including qualitative research, which has largely formed its empirical basis. Table 5 provides a full synthesis of drivers and characteristics. Rather than present the framework as a unified model, Austin and Seitanidi have chosen to define—and for several decades, refine—the framework through scholarly papers (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, 2012a) and practitioner resources (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi, 2014). After review of this body of research and careful consideration of its applicability to ED2WORK's problem of practice, this study synthesized several aspects of this framework.

	Low-Value ⟶	**Value Creation Spectrum**	**⟶**	**High-Value**
Drivers	Philanthropic	Transactional	Integrative	Transformational
Alignment				
Mission Relevance	Peripheral	⟶		Central
Strategic Importance	Insignificant	⟶		Vital
Value Connection	Shallow	⟶		Deep
Problem Knowledge	Unbalanced	⟶		Synchronous
Value Creation Frames	Disparate	⟶		Fused
Benefit Focus	Partnership	⟶		Societal
Engagement				
Emotional Connection	Light	⟶		Profound
Interaction Focus	Procedural	⟶		Substantive
Involvement	Few	⟶		Top to Bottom
Frequency	Occasional	⟶		Intensive
Trust	Modest	⟶		Deep
Active Scope	Narrow	⟶		Broad
Structure	Dyad	⟶		Multi-party
Managerial Complexity	Simple	⟶		Complex
Leverage				
Magnitude of Resources	Small	⟶		Big
Resource Type	Money	⟶		Core Competencies
Resource Link	Separate	⟶		Conjoined
Synergism	Weak	⟶		Predominant
Learning	Low	⟶		Continual
Innovation	Seldom	⟶		Always
Internal Change	Minimal	⟶		Great
External System Change	Rare	⟶		Common

Table 5: CVC Framework Component 2 Synthesis and Summary (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b, 2014)

Component 2 suggests several possibilities for defining collaboration based on the presence and magnitude of drivers, suggesting drivers create higher levels of collaborative value even in a low-level collaboration when present within a partnership. Within consulting, defining the presence and use of drivers and collaboration occurs along four stages.

Philanthropic collaborations (stage one) may involve consulting clients based on minimal and shallow terms. Collaboration at this stage is simple, with little involvement from either the consultant or client. Instances where consultants participate in industry collaborations, round tables, or conferences, usually for business development purposes, resemble low-level philanthropic collaborations. They consist of consultants giving away their time and resources. These collaborations have low activity, low missional alignment, relatively shallow value connections, and little emotional involvement; they are based solely on a unilateral flow of resources from the consultant to the client, such as money but more likely time. Another aspect of philanthropic collaborations is that they are not economically critical for either consultant or client. Clients received a service for free, which consultants may provide with no clear need to generate business.

Transactional collaborations (stage two) extend the collaboration by creating an exchange, usually commercial, that propels the collaboration to deeper involvement. Collaboration at this stage may include contracts for services provided and is the closest to a purely resource-dependent scenario on the client's part. For instance, a client may pay consultants for services, increasing their emotional connection and scope and introducing more managerial complexity, ideally leading to trust. The consultant may, in turn, provide the service but with no expectations of co-creation, synergisms, or external change.

Integrative collaborations (stage three) introduce organizational connections, usually based on mission relevance, higher levels of trust, and equal dependences. These collaborations normally involve a more active scope that requires greater resources, leadership involvement, higher levels of internal change for both the client and consultant (e.g., consultants may adapt their process and practices to accommodate the client), and perhaps an external (societal) change of some kind.

Transformation collaborations (stage four) are the highest and most involved level of collaboration described by the CVC framework. At this stage, clients and consultants become indistinguishable from one another through a seamless flow of resources, high emotional involvement, and high managerial complexity. Transformational collaborations socially co-create value and an external change. Furthermore, transformational collaborations are neither economically critical nor based on dependencies; instead, they are motivated by a societal outcome important enough to outweigh the cost of collaboration.

8. STUDY DESIGN

This project was undertaken as a quality improvement study to help develop ED2WORK's working knowledge of collaborative value (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The research was conducted using qualitative phenomenological approach to understand clients' lived experiences collaborating with consultants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The research was also exploratory rather than causal and sought to uncover or reveal critical information not yet known to the client.

Qualitative research has become more common in recent decades, given its ability to capture and describe socially constructed reality and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 55). A qualitative method provided focus on collaboration experiences and meanings oriented toward exploration and improving practice (Weiss, 1995, pp. 51–52). Following Perry et al. (2020), this study considered the nature of the change being considered and "the unit of analysis that the change is expected to impact" (p. 109). Lofland et al. (2005) proposed nine possible units of analysis for qualitative research, including "encounters" between individuals mediated by sales transactions (pp. 124-125). ED2WORK's problem of practice addresses an experiential change defined by encounters and explained how it works with clients during these encounters. Knowledge of clients' past experiences collaborating with consultants, presumably within the context of a transaction, defined this study's data collection aspect. While it has strong internal validity and may be informative in other contexts, this study is not generalizable.

This study aimed to understand how ED2WORK creates value for its clients and applied CVC as a conceptual framework to guide semi-structured interviews with ED2WORK's clients. Semi-structured interviews were selected to focus on discussions and openness and allow clients' stories to emerge through dialogue rather than a one-way exchange of information (Kvale, 1996, pp. 124–125). The interviews helped identify motivations for (CVC component 1), drivers of (CVC component 2), and barriers and enablers to (CVC component 2) collaboration. They provided an analytical basis through which to develop findings and recommendations. Semi-structured interviews are a widely accepted data collection method for exploratory qualitative research (Kvale, 1996). To understand how they perceived consultants creating collaborative value, interviews followed a discussion guide consisting of several descriptive and exploratory research questions aligned to CVC components 1 and 2, focusing on the collaborative continuum model. Interviews were framed from a “beginners mind.” They were approached from a posture of openness and as if learning new information (Kabat-Zinn & Nhat Hanh, 2009, p. 35).

9. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data for this qualitative study was collected through semi-structured interviews. Using a purposefully selected sample of ED2WORK clients, interviews explored how organizations define collaboration and experienced collaboration with consultants. The interviews were with individuals and followed a standard discussion guide (see Appendix A) shared in advance via email. The CVC framework provided the foundation and interview protocol for the questions exploring how clients worked and collaborated with consultants and their experiences with these partnerships. The CVC framework also informed the coding schema applied to the data. Between November 2020 and February 2021, 14 client interviews were conducted. Organizations were drawn from ED2WORK's past clients, a list of prospective clients in its sales pipeline, and a sample of potential clients within ED2WORK’s network who were aware of ED2WORK and open to using its services but had not previously worked with the company or expressed interest in its services. The interviewees’ names, organizations, and other defining characteristics were suppressed to maintain confidentiality. Interview subjects represented their organizations in the study, with most in executive and senior leadership roles and some in mid-level operational roles. All subjects had experience working with consultants and managing consultant contracts. Table 6 provides an overview of the attributes of the sample of 12 organizations interviewed for this study.

Attributes	**# of Clients**	**Attributes**	**# of Clients**
Organization Types		**Regions Represented**	
Colleges/Universities	5	Arizona	1
Government agencies	2	California	1
Support organizations	2	Kentucky	1
Workforce development	3	Massachusetts	2
		Michigan	1
Gender		North Carolina	1
Female	6	Ohio	1
Male	6	Texas	1
		Washington, D.C.	3
Role in Organization			
Executive/Senior leadership	8	**Relationship to ED2WORK**	5
Department/Division lead	4	Past clients	4
		Prospective clients	3
Job Title		Potential clients	
Chief Strategy Officer	3		
Chief Design Officer	1	**Role in Collaboration**	
Assistant Vice President	1	Main stakeholder/Lead	8
Managing Director	1	Observer/Beneficiary	3
Director of Innovation	1	Participated on engagements	1
Vice President, Marketing	1		
Chief of Staff	1	**Former Consultant?**	
Executive Director	2	Yes	3
Senior Policy Advisor	1	No	9

Table 6: Participant Attributes and Number from Sample

Interviews were conducted following the procedures defined by Creswell and Poth (2018), including using an interview guide, consent, and transcription (p. 166). See Appendix A for the interview guided used for this study. For this analysis, data from two interviews were suppressed because they did not yield helpful insights. One participant obfuscated on several occasions during the interview and did not address the questions. Another, who consented to participate and spoke with me briefly before rescheduling, suddenly left his organization before our rescheduled discussion and was thus unable to participate within the study's time frame.

Due to limitations on in-person meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, video interviews were conducted via Zoom. For scheduling, clients used Calendly, an automatic sign-up tool that allowed clients to select a date and time for the interviews. When submitted, clients automatically received a copy of the discussion guide for review before the interview. Interviews generally lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. Analysis began with a plan to manage the large volume of textual information. After each interview, transcripts were immediately created and "cleaned," eliminating incomplete thoughts, sentence fragments, long pauses, and redundant information and adjusting the transcript punctuation to reflect the interview flow. Dedoose, a mixed-methods analytical software tool, was used for transcript management and analysis. Codes were created to capture mentions of terms and ideas addressed by the CVC framework—e.g., associational, transferred-resource, interaction, and synergistic value. Transcripts were reviewed for patterns and themes. In particular, CVC terms and language immediately stood out, especially elements of associational value based on the relative expertise consultants brought to an organization. To best capture and organize the findings, this study applied a mix of coding methods that guided the analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Attribute coding captures basic information such as client name, organizational type, geographic information, and other attributes. Capturing attributes helps organize data and identify distinctions between different sources (pp. 83-84). Descriptive coding conveys overall impressions of how organizations perceive consulting and consultants in general and their perceptions of value when working with consultants (pp. 102-104). Descriptive codes can be thematic or evaluative. Within the codebook, a section called "Qualities of a Consultant" produced descriptive codes to address research question 1 on what value consultants bring to an organization. Provisional coding is based on CVC components 1 and 2. Provisional codes, consisting of terms, ideas, or concepts developed before data collection and based on a conceptual framework, were appropriate given the mature and empirical nature of the CVC framework (pp. 168-169). Magnitude coding was used to identify where along the CV continuum (component 2, Collaborative Value Drivers) organizations perceived consultants' collaborative value to identify the level of value ED2WORK can reasonably expect to create. Magnitude codes provide a basic description of frequencies and incorporated quantitative methods to improve accuracy and add precision to qualitative analysis (p. 86).

The interviews helped identify motivations for and drivers of collaboration and provided an analytical basis to develop findings and recommendations. Three research questions guided them. Following Kvale (1996), the interview guide used thematic dimensions related to CVC and dynamic dimensions to drive interpersonal relationship throughout the interviews (p. 129). Questions were sequenced to introduce the topic and provide opportunities for greater specificity as this discussion progressed (Flick, 2002, pp. 75–76). This study also applied Lofland et al.'s (2005) typology of interview questions, which when combined resulted in a wide range of perspectives on collaboration. The typology consists of eight themes: types, frequency, magnitude, structure, processes, causes, consequences, and agency (pp. 144-167). Table 7 summarizes the research questions, the CVC components they address, and other details.

Questions	**CVC Component**	**Coding Method**	**Question Typology**	
How do organizations define value when working with consultants?	One, the Value Creation Spectrum	• Attribute • Descriptive • Provisional	• Types • Structure • Causes • Processes • Types	• Magnitude • Frequency • Structure • Consequences
How can ED2WORK create collaborative value?	Two, Collaborative Value Drivers	• Provisional • Magnitude	• Types • Processes • Agency	• Magnitude • Structure
What barriers and enablers are in place that influence the impact of collaborative value creation?	Two, Collaborative Value Drivers	• Magnitude • Descriptive	• Frequency • Consequences • Magnitude	• Agency • Structure

Table 7: Research and Interview Questions and Details

10. ANALYSIS

Based on the literature review and the structure provided by coding frameworks, interview data was mined for practical insights, frequently mentioned themes, and change ideas. The study incorporated different client types, some were past clients and some perspectives, revealing many insights into the nature of collaboration and collaborative value based on the CVC framework. Minus the two suppressed interviews, clients were clear, experienced, and knowledgeable of their contexts and experience with consulting relationships. In some cases, clients were former consultants themselves and expressed familiarity with the nature of client collaboration and gratitude for being invited to participate in this study.

The findings revealed clients' perceptions of consultants and what value they believed consultants created for their organizations. The data reflected qualities clients look for when hiring consultants, motivation for working with consultants, and ways consultants can create value through credibility, trust, and commitment to client success once a client relationship has been established. Further, clients shared reflections on how consultants create collaborative value and enablers and barriers to the impact of collaborative consulting engagements. The depth and breadth of the data collected were informative and comprehensive. An abbreviated version of the main findings, organized by research questions, findings, and recommendations for ED2WORK, is provided.

Research Question 1: How do organizations define value when working with consultants?

This question was intended to provide clients with an opportunity to speak broadly about their organizations and experience working with consultants, both ED2WORK and other firms. While interviews were semi-structured, clients addressed the concept of value in general and what value—if any—they perceived consultants offered. The concept of collaboration was introduced throughout the interviews. Clients were easily able to address their experiences collaborating with consultants. Component 1 (see Table 2) provided the analytical basis for addressing this research question but was not presented explicitly in the interview. For instance, at the outset, the word "value" and not "collaborative value" was used to capture how clients perceived consultants in general and then whether they had ever had an experience with a consultant they would describe as collaborative in some way. Interview questions, which varied somewhat across clients, yielded several findings, synthesized below.

Finding 1: Clients described consultants' knowledge, a transferred resource, as defining value.

Interviews provided a unique lens into the value clients believed consultants created. Clients described several reasons to hire outside consultants, not the least of which included a need for knowledge and expertise. Descriptions of knowledge had the largest number of codes assigned in the analysis, with consultants' knowledge, expertise, and experience by far being the primary reason organizations hire consultants. As one client stated, "It makes sense to hire a consultant when you do not feel like you have the house expertise to solve a problem." Another stated, "We work with consultants to get smarter about things. It is about knowledge acquisition for me personally and the members of my team that is involved in the work." Clients mentioned a need for expertise specifically when executing complex organizational change initiatives, conducting market research, and developing strategic plans. Referencing ED2WORK, clients mentioned needing access to best practices for developing programs for working learners, which most clients felt their organizations lacked. Several clients mentioned the Covid-19 pandemic and growing concerns about their organization's ability to adapt to volatility and future uncertainty. When prompted to describe past work with consultants, most clients distinguished between two types of consultants: strategy consultants delivering knowledge-based services and technical consultants supporting the use of proprietary education and enterprise technologies. A few clients reported they did not view either type of consultant as adding more or less collaborative value. However, most indicated that "it depended" on the level of knowledge consultants brought to their organizations.

Clients consistently described knowledge received from consultants as establishing a basis for collaborative value when transferred as ideas, research, and recommendations. Knowledge drives awareness of and engagement with consultants and new ways of engaging consultants, which may later involve the consultant working within a more active scope. Clients also explained consultants had instincts and impulses based on experience from past engagements, professional experiences, and networks, collaborating with consultants is imperative, amplifying their dependence on consultants.

Finding 2: Knowledge creates collaborative value and may also be an entry point for other value types.

Clients mentioned collaborative value developing from the transfer of knowledge, which in some cases served as a proof-point for other value types. As one client stated, “The collaboration starts with strong subject matter expertise. When consultants have a strong grasp of the subject matter, great knowledge, and expertise, they can provide more value. I would say that it starts there and can increase the next round, which is about collaboration.” Based on knowledge transferred, clients mentioned additional forms of collaborative value, such as associational value that comes from consultants’ expertise. One client mentioned the value of hiring technology pioneer Vint Cerf, indicating that Cerf was “someone that the technology world respected and that gave us legitimacy” to a particular project. Clients explained that the “air cover” consultants bring can mitigate internal conflict around complex or difficult decisions. One stated, “Experience, track record, and credibility. One of the reasons you hire a consultant is to push an agenda with folks inside your organization.” Another stated, “They [internal stakeholders] will constantly push against you on political issues but having that third party come in has the credibility attached to their name or organization.”

In addition to associational value, clients also mentioned forms of interactional value. Clients mentioned growing awareness of consultants’ value, deepening trust, and a willingness to include them more broadly in organizational activities within or beyond the scope of a current engagement. One stated, “Once we have decided to work together, I want them to feel part of a team. I am not interested in really formal structures. I would rather have a free exchange of ideas.” Clients also, however, indicated that consultants themselves need to possess collaborative capacities in order to create other value types. One client stated, “What matters to us is a consultant's ability to scale with us. We may have scoped a very small kind of project, but if that works, do they have the bench strength to be able to support the work over time." More tactically, another stated: "Consultants have to be excellent listeners, and then they have to be smart. They have to provide a synthesis of ideas that made me see things in a new way. They need to bring intellectual power. That is what I am looking for."

Recommendation 1: Lead with knowledge to create collaborative value and identify strategies to create other value types over time.

ED2WORK's greatest resource is knowledge, which is the basis for creating collaborative value. ED2WORK should consider the nature and breadth of their knowledge and identify aspects of transferred resources that can create associational or interactional value. Furthermore, ED2WORK should pay attention to the sequencing of collaborative value, building first on transferred-resource value before introducing new value types. While interview data was not comprehensive enough to explicitly define this sequence, the logic of value creation for ED2WORK may flow directionally from knowledge to interactions created over time. ED2WORK, for instance, should pay immediate attention to its consultants' backgrounds and relative expertise and use these as a basis for defining collaboration. Figure 2 provides a proposed logical structure for defining the scope of and sequencing collaborative value over time.

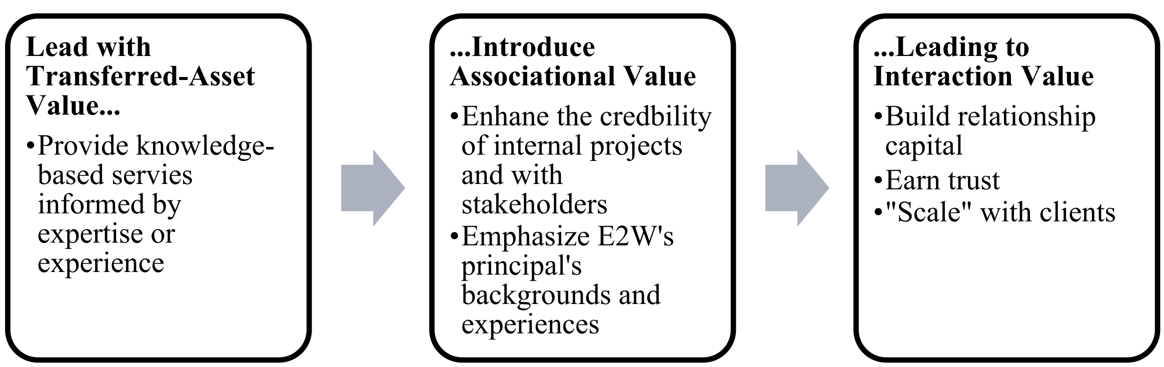

Figure 2: Logic Structure

Research Question 2: How can ED2WORK create collaborative value?

This question is intended to reveal the level of collaborative value ED2WORK can reasonably expect to create based on the CVC framework. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) emphasized that while component 1, the value creation spectrum (associational → synergistic value), is largely descriptive, component 2, collaborative value drivers, is evaluative and can help situate a partnership along the collaboration continuum based on the magnitude of alignment, engagement, and leverage drivers (pp. 737-738). The line of questioning throughout the interviews helped determine where ED2WORK sits along the continuum and identify strategies it can employ to create higher collaborative value.

Finding 3: Clients described consultants as creating transactional collaborative value.

Most clients described the value of collaboration and the reciprocal learning that collaborations create. Many expressed interest in collaborating with consultants and had some experience with these engagements, though most limited their descriptions to transactional value. While ED2WORK may aspire to create high-level collaborative value, its engagements likely fall at a lower level along the collaboration continuum. Clients mentioned several drivers of transactional value. To situate findings along the continuum, respondents addressed the presence and intensity of collaboration drivers. Weights were applied based on descriptors from the value creation spectrum to arrive at an estimated magnitude of collaborative value clients experienced or would expect to experience when working with consultants. Table 8 presents the results of the analysis.

Low⟶ Value Creation Continuum ⟶ High

	Philanthropic (=1)	**Transactional (=2)**	**Integrative (=3)**	**Transformational (=4)**
Alignment	Code Magnitude Average (42 codes) 2.4			
	"The philanthropic community has been terrific. Gates has stepped up over the past decade and is doing more and more in terms of national or regional studies."	"They help us to form our ideas. They also fact check us when we cite false evidence, or they point us towards others that we should do so."	"As consultants become part of the network, they become a thought partner. ED2WORK is a thought partner for me."	"Every day, we had contact…rounds of meetings and whiteboarding sessions. We worked side by side at every phase of the process."
Engagement	Code Magnitude Average (101 codes) 2.4			
	"We could do the information gathering, but we have 300 other things going on. It is the cost-benefit of outsourcing that makes sense."	"It is a very collaborative kind of experience when the customer feels like they are not being taught but listened to."	"A team that includes consultants requires full trust, full communication, and full transparency, and high visibility."	"Consultants might have been violin soloists, but I wanted them to feel a part of the orchestra."
Leverage	Code Magnitude Average (105 codes) 1.9			
	"What I am looking for in a consultant are resources for my team. I do not want to create an unnecessary dependency on a consultant."	"What you want the consultant to do is to listen, ask good questions, and empower the organization to change."	"There is a consultancy that we use for strategic planning. We use their name as a verb."	"I did not distinguish them from my internal colleagues. I mean, they were just, we were all part of a team trying to gather and execute on a really hard project for the community."

Table 8: Magnitude Coding Applied to Collaboration Continuum

Interviews revealed several drivers of transactional collaboration and ways ED2WORK could move to higher levels. Alignment drivers included mission relevance when choosing consultants and the presence of shared values between clients and consultants, creating more than a simple philanthropic relationship because, on average, clients were open to sharing, learning from, and adapting to the consultants' knowledge but were not necessarily integrated or transformational across responses. They did not object to higher levels of collaboration but generally had not experienced them. Among clients that had experienced higher levels of collaboration, experiences were generally positive. Some clients reported that higher levels of collaboration were not the consultant's responsibility but rather their ability to leverage consultants and their responsibility to create collaborative experiences.

In general, clients described drivers of higher value, especially problem knowledge and shared values. Clients shared some of these experiences, including mentioning consultants as "thought partners" based on knowledge and consultants' awareness of and alignment with their organizations' missions. Engagement drivers included emotional connections formed with consultants, and clients indicated how involved consultants could or should become within their organizations, though again these drivers were not necessarily integrated or transformational. Some clients mentioned instances where they formed a deep emotional bond with consultants, which increased trust, involvement, and the scope of the engagement. As with alignment drivers, these later stages of value occurred over time. Mentioned leverage drivers included the magnitude of resources consultants brought to the collaboration, including core competencies and high involvement. Additionally, leverage drivers included an internal change that resulted from collaborative consultants, such as significant policy or process changes that impacted an organization even after the collaboration. Unlike alignment and engagement drivers, leveraged drivers were much lower in the continuum, almost philanthropic. Clients expressed not wanting to become "too dependent" on consultants or not having the capacity to interact with consultants to fully leverage them in collaborative ways.

Recommendation 2: Expect transactional engagements but employ drivers to create higher collaborative value.

An important determinant for moving beyond transactional value, which ED2WORK aspires to achieve, is to employ drivers that create integrative and transformational value. This study extracted areas where, based on insights from the CVC framework, ED2WORK could drive higher value. Austin and Seitanidi (2014) recommend using placement characteristics along the continuum as a basis for identifying drivers that could be amplified to create higher-value partnerships (pp. 123-124). For instance, ED2WORK could amplify its knowledge to include greater mission and values alignment. Clients hire consultants to help them solve a problem, but when missions and values align, this analysis suggests collaborations may create higher value. A critical driver may be for ED2WORK to stress the importance of a two-way exchange of knowledge and listen to and interact with clients at all phases of an engagement. ED2WORK should also consider its role as a "thought partner," recognizing the value of collaborative conversations with client, which amplify problem knowledge, trust, and shared strategies for internal change. Being a thought partner may increase opportunities for ED2WORK to work side-by-side with clients at higher levels of value. Table 9 presents a summary of strategies ED2WORK may wish to employ to drive higher levels of value.

		Value Creation Spectrum →	**High**
	Transactional	**Integrative**	**Transformational**
Alignment	→	• Emphasize knowledge resources and problem knowledge • Find areas of mission alignment • Become a thought-partner to clients	
Engagement	→	• Listen actively, ask questions, learn the organization • Build trust • Increase frequency of client communication/interactions	
Leverage	→	• Bring core competencies to a collaboration • Find ways to drive internal change • Emphasize social value/external change from collaboration	

Table 9: Strategies to Create Higher Collaborative Value

Research Question 3: What enablers and barriers are in place that influence the impact of collaborative value creation?

This question was intended to closely examine factors within organizations impacting collaboration with consultants. The goal was to identify specific factors that drive collaboration to lower or higher levels to help ED2WORK anticipate better externalities impacting collaboration. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) recommend several approaches to identify collaboration outcomes. One technique analyzes moments of "collaborative convergence" when partners name and assign value to collaboration and identify factors that created convergence (pp. 733-734). Interviews yielded several insights into factors enabling or preventing convergence from clients' perspectives. To align with previous findings, responses were mapped to drivers of the collaboration continuum to help ED2WORK achieve better collaborative outcomes. Overall, this study analyzed 63 interview quotes, which were coded initially as "enablers" and "barriers" and then mapped using a code co-occurrence chart to situate the findings within the three drivers.

Finding 4: Clients mentioned cultural and procedural factors within their organizations, many beyond ED2WORK's control, influencing collaboration.

This study revealed that collaboration is feasible but that ED2WORK must constantly and intentionally work with clients to create higher levels of collaborative value. Consultants do not immediately create collaborative value on a given engagement but rather earn it over time and under the right conditions. Addressing alignment drivers, clients mentioned enablers such as mission relevance and high problem knowledge from the consultant, which creates a value creation frame from which to drive collaboration to higher levels. One client stated, "I would say mission alignment matters a lot. It goes a long way in our organization." Clients mentioned barriers such as consultants not understanding how education organizations work or suspicion among their colleagues of consultants' profit motives, typically within post-secondary education. One client stated, in relation to academic culture, "The biggest barrier would be neoliberal resistance. There is a strong threat among our faculty that any engagement with for-profit organizations, which all come to all consultancies, is opening the door to a corporate takeover of higher education."

Addressing engagement enablers, clients mentioned establishing trust by working productively with clients and forming deeper connections across the organization throughout an engagement. Many asserted that qualities were a key component of trust-building. One client stated, "I mean, that is one of the most important things. I think we need to trust each other." Trust could be as easily earned as it could be lost. Trust could be lost based on factors beyond consultants' control. For instance, even with engagement enablers in place, clients mentioned low trust among their colleagues. One client stated, "Many in my organization do not share my worldview that you have a body of knowledge consultants bring. You can leverage it to accelerate your work. It is just not the mindset that's been a huge barrier to success." Clients also mentioned financial barriers limiting collaboration, such as budget constraints. Budgets for working with consultants are generally limited, constraining the scope of an engagement and a consultant's ability to work collaboratively with clients. Clients simply were unable or unwilling to pay for higher levels of collaboration Some clients even expressed concerns about hiring consultants to work collaboratively, knowing their organizations would likely not execute a contract that would be feasible for the consultant.

Leverage enablers included clients having an infrastructure to manage collaborative engagements, which clients described as complex and requiring significant internal oversight at higher levels. As with engagement drivers, clients described leverage barriers as mostly outside the consultant's control. For instance, one client working within a large complex State system stated, "In our State, there are certain challenges with procurement, which make hiring consultants difficult." Other barriers included, in most instances, a lack of infrastructure and slow procurement processes, especially in government agencies. Additionally, clients mentioned a lack of capacity, even willingness, within their organizations to absorb collaborative value and interact with consultants for long periods, whether based on a lack of experience working collaboratively with consultants (or at all) or unwillingness to change. As one client stated, "If we had greater capacity and understanding how to use consultants, we would be able to do more of it."

Another client stated, “So, I think the barrier would be that sometimes the organization itself can be reluctant to take a hard look at itself.” Figure 3 summarizes these findings based on factors within and beyond ED2WORK’s control as it seeks to create collaborative value with clients.

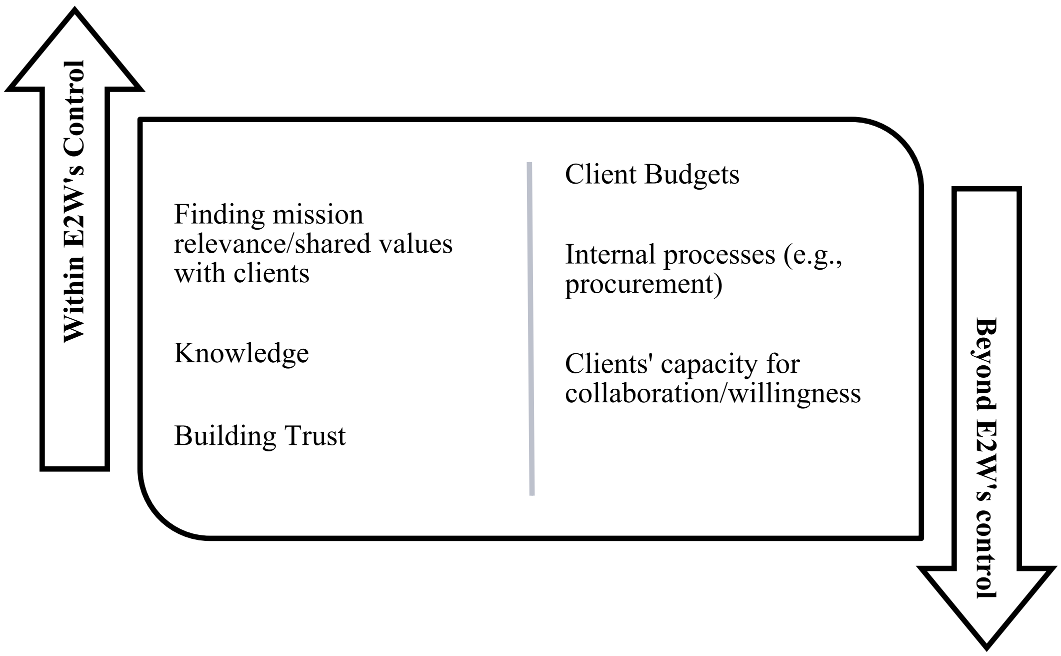

Figure 3: Summary of Factors Impacting Collaboration

Finding 5: Interviews revealed the presence of a promoter role within organizations that can impact collaborative value.

Specific interviewees indicated that they had influence over how their organizations worked collaboratively with consultants. One client stated, “When you work in a complex organization, one person has to be the point person for that consultant so that they can interact with other people.” Many clients described taking steps to define what value consultants create and how they, as point people, drive collaborative value with consultants for their organizations. One client stated, “We try to create a seamless environment. I just wanted everything to be as cohesive as seamless, fun, friendly, and as joyful as possible for everybody.” These individuals recognized consultants’ contributions in helping their organizations address challenges and the logistics needed to help collaborative engagements succeed. Throughout this process, individuals appeared to function as promoters justifying consultants’ collaborative value, sometimes against detractors within their organizations. Being a promoter appeared to be a disposition based on clients' backgrounds, experiences, and commitments. One client even stated, “Somebody said to me, and I took it as a great compliment that I was a good consumer of consultants and that I knew how to use them and how to work with them.” Individuals also indicated wanting consulting engagements to succeed and a willingness to advocate for consultants even against their own organizations.

Recommendation 3: Identify promoters and work with them to create collaborative value.

ED2WORK should take its relationships with promoters seriously and leverage them to create collaborative value. ED2WORK should treat promoters as collaborators themselves and apply each of the principles identified in the CVC framework to promoters as representatives of their client organizations. ED2WORK should not only share knowledge with promoters but build relationships build on trust among three drivers. How ED2WORK works with promoters to navigate barriers may be one of the most important methods to create collaborative value.

11. DISCUSSION

This study revealed several insights for ED2WORK to consider as it aspires to create collaborative value with clients. For one, according to the CVC framework, collaborating with clients is certainly feasible. As a knowledge-based consultancy, ED2WORK is already collaborating with clients on some level. Clients define collaborative value primarily around the knowledge transfer that occurs on an engagement, which over time can create higher levels of collaborative value. ED2WORK would, however, need to gain clients’ trust while also working with promoters to leverage ED2WORK’s services in this way. This study also revealed that not all clients have the capacity or willingness to work collaboratively with consultants in this manner, so ED2WORK will also need to account for the possibility of lower collaborative value on some engagements.

One important direction for this study is to better understand the relationship between knowledge and collaborative value. The CVC framework offers several insights. For one, knowledge is intangible and as such, fungible. Knowledge creates “capacity-enhancing” value that can benefit a receiving organization by augmenting its existing capabilities or introducing new capabilities to address challenges they may not even know they have (Austin & Seitanidi, 2014, pp. 28–29, 201). Over time, knowledge can create higher levels of collaborative value because it surfaces complexities that can, from the client perspective, create higher dependence on consultants. Knowledge, in other words, is a means to establishing resource-dependence. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) also point out that knowledge is intertwined with other factors such as trust, communication, and transparency, which together provide a basis for higher levels of collaboration (p. 743). Returning to Zott and Amit (2007), ED2WORK should also leverage these findings to define its business model. For instance, ED2WORK should identity the content of its business model, taking inventory of its background, expertise, and experiences when determining how to collaborate with clients. ED2WORK should consider the structure of its client interactions. At least to start, ED2WORK is in the business of selling transactional engagements and needs to structure its engagements such that relationships with clients can evolve to integrative and transformational levels. Furthermore, ED2WORK should be ready to determine the scope of engagements at a transactional level and be aware of budgeting and procurement limitations as it determines pricing and the overall costs of an engagement. ED2WORK should also be prepared to expand an engagement to respond to client needs and “scale” with them to meet the demand for higher levels of collaboration. Zott and Amit (2007) also address the overall governance of a business. ED2WORK needs to create a structure that enables it to build trust with clients, perhaps by ensuring leadership remain present at all phases of an engagement and able to interact with and build relationships with promoters. Leadership’s mandate would be to facilitate the knowledge transfer that occurs on an engagement and oversee the evolution of an engagement to create higher collaborative value. Finally, a business model should account for the tension between aspirations and constraints. ED2WORK should consider the cost of higher levels of collaboration and whether it and its clients can afford this service. Especially since this study revealed that collaborative value is already being created on some level, ED2WORK should also consider whether lower levels of collaborative value satisfy its clients and fulfill its purpose-driven mission. Expanding the company's capacity in this way introduces higher levels of complexity and will require more from ED2WORK as engagements mature. ED2WORK should ensure they can move beyond the transactional stage and be prepared to create and sustain higher levels of value.

12. LIMITATIONS

This study had several limitations that pose threats to its internal or external validity. First, ED2WORK is a small firm with a limited number of clients. The findings may have omitted or obscured details that would normally result from a larger and more diverse client base. Prospective clients in ED2WORK's sales pipeline were also leveraged to expand the sample but made up a segment of the analysis that may have been less familiar with the nuances of ED2WORK and its business model. Additionally, potential clients were also sourced for this study, and while most were familiar with ED2WORK not all were from organizations that would consider ED2WORK for consulting services. Overall, the qualitative interview pool was skewed toward potential and prospective clients with limited input from clients who have actually had experience working directly with ED2WORK.

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the original intent of this study. Originally, semi-structured interviews were to be supplemented with an on-site observation of an ED2WORK engagement. Restrictions related to quarantines and social distancing did not permit for this analysis, which could have revealed insights into collaborative value and drivers not surfaced by the interviews. Additionally, COVID-19 came up frequently in interviews. Presumably, the effects of this pandemic have—and will continue to have—strategic ramifications on education organizations for years to come. However, this study largely suppressed these findings on the assumption that capturing the implications of this event in relation to ED2WORK's problem of practice warranted a separate study. In hindsight, this study could have taken COVID-19 more into consideration, recognizing that it has influenced clients' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors and may indicate a new direction for ED2WORK to create collaborative value at this pivot moment in time.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Potential Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews developed using Austin and Seitanidi's (2012b) Collaborative Value Creation framework.

Setting the Stage— how do organizations define collaborative value when working with consultants?

1. Tell me about the mission of your organization and how you serve the needs of learners.
2. Describe some of the most pressing challenges facing your organization today.
3. Describe how you use outside consultants to assist in these areas.
4. What value would you say consultants bring to your organization in helping you address these challenges?
5. Have you ever had an experience working with a consultant that you would say was "collaborative" in some way? If so, please describe the engagement and experience.

Creating Collaborative Value—How can ED2WORK create collaborative value with its clients?

1. What qualities do you generally look for in a consultant?
2. When working with consultants, what do you generally want that experience to be like over the course of an engagement?
3. What kind of resources do you expect the consultant to bring to that engagement? What resources would you expect to bring?

Collaboration Dynamics—What barriers/enablers are in place that influences the impact of collaborative value creation?

1. Do you believe working with consultants allows you to accomplish more than you would on your own?
2. What barriers do you believe exist within your organization to collaborating more with consultants?