



Adventist Human-Subject
Research Association-*Asia*



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Collaboration in Research: Partnerships for Synergetic Scholarly Outcomes and Mission Effectiveness

THEME:

I WILL GO:

Collaboration, Conversations,
and Celebration Through Research



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Safary Wa-Mbaleka

General Conference

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What's Collaboration?

- Cooperation
- Partnership
- Alliance

- Individual collaboration
Vs.
- Institutional collaboration

One World

- No one is an island.
- No one has it all.
- No one knows it all.
- Everyone needs someone.
- Whoever has today may lack tomorrow.
- Whoever lacks today may have much tomorrow.
- We are called to work together.

Research Reality Today

Interdisciplinary research has emerged as a key driver of innovation and knowledge integration...recent research highlights that interdisciplinary collaboration not only enhances the quality of research but also contributes significantly to scientific impact and societal relevance (Park et al., 2023)...

(Gaur, 2024, p. 133)

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Philippians 2:1-2 (BSB)

¹Therefore if you have any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,
²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit and purpose.

Unity Among Christian Researchers

- Being a researcher who is a follower of Christ means:
- being “united in the spirit and purpose” with Christ and others,
- which is only possible through **positive collaboration**
 - Under the guidance of the **Holy Spirit**.



Benefits of Research Collaboration

- Never-imagined opportunities
 - Access to infrastructures
 - Resource maximization
 - Building each other up
 - Financial access
 - Mutual support
 - Mutual benefits
 - Efficiency
 - Synergy

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(Anderson, et al. 2025; Barthelmes et al., 2025; Cajelo et al., 2026; Frosta et al., 2024, Schwartz & Durkin, 2019)



GC Research Collaboration

1. Church Members' Survey: 12 regional teams
2. Institutional Workers' Survey
3. Global Adventist Pastors' Survey
4. Nurture and Retention Survey
5. Higher Education Teachers' Survey
6. Adventist Leaders' Survey



Collaboration Challenges

- Fear
- Finances
- Competition
- Confidentiality
- Cultural values
- Misaligned systems
- Limited commitment
- Disciplinary differences
- Institutional bureaucracy
- Pride
- Finances
- Limited vision
- Institutional ego
- Different priorities
- Different work ethic
- Insufficient finances
- Independent tendency
- Ownership of written work

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(Durante, 2022; Locke et al., Meißner & Vowe, 2022; Yao, 2021)



Collaboration Challenges

- Heavy Workload
- Geographic distance
- Status & role conflicts
- Ethics/conflict of interest
- Size of the research team
- Various educational contexts
- Gender & cultural differences
- Limited collaboration experience
- Ineffective/insufficient communication
- Unprofessional/ineffective/unsupportive leadership

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Collaboration Challenges: A Synthesis

- Uncertainties
- Fairness problem
- Difference problem
- Relationship problem
- Commitment problem
- Management problem
- Communication problem

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(Durante, 2022; Meißner & Vowe, 2022; Vollebregt et al., 2025)

Effects of Poor Collaboration Mission

- Duplication of resources, projects, & services
 - Unsustainable research projects
 - Culture of mission competition
 - Disconnected research effort
 - Mission ineffectiveness



Biblical Counsel

- Philippians 2:3-4 (BSB): ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up... (1 Thessalonians 5:11a)
- For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:10)



Some Disturbing Research Practices

- Each researcher to him-/herself
- Unethical co-author collaboration
- Each institution for itself
- No benchmarking culture
- No Division-based research unit
- No Division-wide research agenda
- No collaboration between researchers and church leadership

Collaboration Process

1. Develop collaboration idea.
2. Identify the partner(s).
3. Establish guiding principles (shared goals, project focus, nature of partnership, communication, outcomes, timelines, shared conflict mitigation/resolution)
4. Agree on financial responsibilities & sharing.
5. Develop the full plan (milestones, timelines, responsibilities, etc.).

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Collaboration Process

6. Develop (and sign) agreement.
7. Develop relationships (team members, stakeholders, accountability, meetings).
8. Execute the plan.
9. Meet according to plan and as needed.
10. Monitor and reevaluate the plan.
11. Celebrate the completion.
12. Plan the next steps.



Some Best Practices

Individual Level

- Faculty mentoring each other
- Faculty mentoring students
- Faculty collaborating with each other
- Faculty collaborating with with external scholars



Some Best Practices

Institutional Level

- Interdisciplinary research agenda
- Collaboration recognition/reward
- Agreements for each collaboration
- Acceptable guidelines, policies, and regulations
- Inter-institutional collaboration: resources, training, projects

(Australian Research Council, 2020; Frosta et al., 2024)

Some Best Practices

Institution's responsibilities

- Develop and monitor collaborative research agreements.
- Comply with multi-institutional agreements and relevant institutional policies.
- Conduct research responsibly and report potential breaches of the agreement.

(Australian Research Council, 2020)

Some Best Practices

Community Level

- Research "with" instead of "on" participants
- Community as co-researchers
- Community as co-policymakers



Some Best Practices

Church Level

- Research in the local church
- Research for/ with conference, union, division, GC
- Research dialogues
- Mission-effectiveness research culture promotion

Areas of Collaboration

- Research projects
- Co-presentation
- Co-authorship
- Speakers/ trainers exchange
- Research faculty exchange
- Institution-church collaboration

Guiding Principles of Effective Collaboration

1. Mutual trust and respect
2. Equitable power sharing and inclusion
3. Mitigation of discrimination
4. Equitable sharing of benefits, responsibilities, resources, and data
5. Effective communication utilizing inclusive language
6. Fair acknowledgement of contributions
7. Sustainable capacity building
8. Ethical conduct of research
9. Effective monitoring and evaluation
10. Fair conflict resolution
11. Transparency and accountability
12. Planning an exit strategy

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Takeaway

1. Two are better than one for synergy.
2. Unity in diversity strengthens scholars.
3. Research collaboration can support mission better.
4. Collaboration can be with individuals, church, community.
5. Collaboration is a Biblical principle and a Christian value.



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