
ACTION-RESEARCH

Building Collective Leadership Capacity: Lessons Learned from a University-Community Partnership

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Nine deliberative civic engagement forums were convened using a community-driven framework in order to co-emerge what was required to make systemic change. In the context of these forums, we identified the perception community members had when approaching collective work, the dispositions they initially called upon when making-sense of collective action, and barriers that prevent collective work. The article concludes by offering a direction to attend to both individual and collective outcomes when working to deepen capacity of community to advance collective action.

Keywords: Collective Leadership; Deliberative Civic Engagement; Community Development

Introduction

In 2015, a comprehensive community needs-assessment was conducted for the purposes of planning and strategic change in Riley County, Kansas. Amongst the findings was a notable theme – there seemed to be “a discrepancy between the perception of opportunities available and a sense of empowerment or responsibility to take advantage of them” (Gregory, Coleman, & Jolley, 2015, p. 14). According to the survey data, respondents perceived an active sense of civic responsibility, engagement, and volunteer opportunities. Yet, those surveyed *disagreed* with the statement that “all residents think they can make the community a better place to live” (p. 14) and felt unsatisfied with local government. The discrepancy – or “gap” between espoused values and lived experience – highlights an underlying adaptive challenge (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

While these survey results were specific to our community, the feeling and expression of alienation or dispossession from civic work and community change parallels national and global trends (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Within the United States, more and more people choose to remove themselves from productive forms of collaborative political engagement and associational life (Levine, 2013; Putnam, 2015). Associational life is made up from the “patterns of civic engagement that mediate democratic practices and forms of participation” (Jamal, 2007, p. 2). Associational life is realized practically through the relationships in which people pursue shared purposes and gain access to resources that influence political institutions. In the face of public challenges (e.g., poverty, education, health inequities), communities have struggled to mobilize through collective action in civic spaces (Allen, 2004; Levine & Liu, 2015). At the same time, increased reliance on professional lobbyists, suspicion of the media, and negative political campaigns have created a growing disconnect between citizens, the political systems associated with representative government, and officials elected to create change (Mathews, 1999).

Within these tensions, whose work is it to lead change? Chrislip and O’Malley (2013) suggested that “each of us shares directly in both problems and opportunities of civic life, so we bear some responsibility for making progress” (p. 19–20). Leadership in this context is understood as producing direction and organizing processes that account for collective action in circumstance of uncertainty (Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Raelin, 2016). Exercising a form of leadership that creates community change requires learning and the engagement of many stakeholders (Chrislip & O’Malley, 2013).

This paper highlights a university-community partnership between the Konza United Way, Harvesters Community Food Network, and the Staley School of Leadership Studies at Kansas State University. These partners shared a commitment to making progress on public problems in advancement of the common good. The purpose of our partnership was to engage in collaborative learning with community members, advance connections to the organizations, enhance the public presence of the groups, and build a sense of empowerment around important issues facing the communities and counties they serve. We engaged in “research as action,” in which the research process was also a community organizing process designed to build capacity and connections within and between groups and organizations (Stoecker, 2013, p. 159). This was accomplished through a series of “community conversations” – a deliberative civic engagement strategy utilizing storytelling to identify actions that make progress on community needs.

Deliberative civic engagement is a democratic practice of associational life that builds community capacity through dialogic exchange. To engage civically through deliberation requires creating the conditions for intentional conversation, in which participants carefully weigh different perspectives against each other. We suggest that these conversations can be viewed as leadership activity. Our study is framed through this lens: that leadership is collective, emergent, and co-constructed through dialogue. The purpose of this study was to identify and critically analyze the perceptions and dispositions of community members participating in the community conversations. For the purpose of this study, the term *perception* describes the way community members see themselves within the project of collective work. The term *disposition* describes the qualities and characteristics necessary to support collective leadership. Specifically, we sought to answer the questions:

1. How did participants perceive their role in community change efforts?
2. What do these perceptions reveal about dispositions that help or inhibit collective leadership activity?

Conceptual Framework

Democracy: Cultivating Collective Capacity

Early understandings of American democracy emphasized collective interest, or the link between individual interests and a larger public good. As Tocqueville (1969) theorized, Americans’ self-interest was a way “to combine their own advantage with that of their fellow citizens” (p. 52). Civic engagement becomes an essential component of associational life that shifts individual self-interest to align with a larger concern for the common good. According to Berger (2011), civic engagement is a social and conceptual construct. The *civic* encompasses social, political, economic, and moral spheres (2011). When expressed in a context of community, *engagement* balances levels of attention to and action on public issues. However, associational life that is framed by principles of a community good seems to be in decline.

Social science literature points to trends that certain segments of society experience increased social and political isolation (Sander & Putnam, 2010). Berger (2011) described how a radical focus on private interests, family, commerce, and materialism limits the capacities of community to make progress on public problems. Efforts are needed to re-imagine democratic practices and politics that renew the pursuit and commitment towards shared values and collective interest. Berger (2011) suggested that, “as citizens treat common problems in common, their initially self-involved perspectives often widen to include notions of duty and reciprocal responsibility” (p. 109).

For theorists like Tocqueville (1969) and Berger (2011), the creation of strong political associations requires cultivating a sense of collective responsibility – the mindset and ability to care, engage, and participate in civic life. But in order to make progress on the public problems facing communities, community members must also develop collective capacity – the group and system-level skills and efficacy to design and deploy strategic activity as means to achieve long-term outcomes (Ospina et al., 2012). Community members not only have competing commitments and limited energy for public matters but are increasingly unable to imagine the collective capacity necessary to move beyond individual acts of service or charity (Morton, 1995). In a free society, it would be unacceptable to coerce community members to participate in civic work. Rather collective capacity and action result when people feel invited to convene and believe that their efforts can and will result in actual social change. Our university-community partnership invited community members to engage in a deliberative civic engagement strategy as a means to build capacity in and across individuals and community organizations.

Deliberative Civic Engagement

Deliberative civic engagement encompasses a broad set of democratic processes for participation with a goal to surface, understand, and address citizens' common concerns (Nabatchi, 2012). Deliberative civic engagement includes four elements: (a) a "demographically representative set of people," (b) facilitated small group discussions "designed to move talk toward action," (c) the opportunity to compare values and experiences in relation to relevant, positions, and information," and (d) an intention to "produce outcomes that more closely align systems, organizations, and institutions with the attitudes and behaviors of citizens" (Leighninger, 2012, p. 20). When overlaid with practices of social change leadership, deliberative civic engagement creates the conditions for collective capacity building and collective action through distinct leadership practices of reframing discourse, bridging differences among diverse factions, as well as unleashing human energies (Ospina et al., 2012). These practices create the conditions for transformational learning and the recognition of individual and collective power that comes from lived experiences. Storytelling "links one's personal experience to that of others and helps people realize that what they experience is connected to larger systemic forces" (Ospina et al., 2012, p. 275).

Ganz (2010, 2011) provided a framework of public narrative that further illustrates how story can empower progress. Ganz (2011) suggested that when confronted with a challenge, "purposeful action" is constructed from "why" and "how" questions embedded within story. Purposeful action occurs when community realizes the gap between "the world as it is" versus "the world as it ought to be" (Ganz, 2011, p. 278). Our university-community partnership deployed public narrative as a deliberative civic engagement approach to make progress on identifying important public issues and building participants' capacity for collective responsibility and action. This project positions deliberative civic engagement as a civic leadership education pedagogy through the form of public narrative (Ganz, 2010, 2011) that is described further in our methods.

Methodology

Our method was guided by the philosophy and practice of community-engaged scholarship, and more specifically deliberative pedagogy, which integrates academic work with deliberative practices (e.g., forums, community meetings) to address public problems (Shaffer, Longo, Manosevitch, & Thomas, 2017). We followed commitments of democratically-centered university-community partnerships: co-creation, reciprocity, and mutual benefit (Dostillio et al., 2012). The larger assumption of these commitments is that engaged research practice is itself a civic leadership endeavor; and the deliberative process not only attempts to answer the inquiry questions, but also bolster the capacities of civic leadership within the community.

Participants and Sites

Participants in the community engagement process included 20 college students, two university faculty, three community partner representatives, and 140 community members at nine sites within six local counties.

College students/leadership course. The civic leadership course, *Leadership in Practice*, was offered as the third core course in a sequenced interdisciplinary leadership studies minor program within the Staley School of Leadership Studies. The 20 students were upper-level students (juniors and seniors), representing diverse areas of study.

Community collaborators. Our collaborators were co-designers of the deliberative civic engagement forums. The Konza United Way seeks to create long lasting changes in communities around the public problems of education, income, and health. The Harvesters Community Food Network is a regional non-profit that provides emergency food support and educational programs around hunger and nutrition.

Locations. We held nine deliberative civic engagement forums which we called "community conversations." A pilot forum was held in November 2014, with the primary project running January 2015 through May 2015. The site of the public forums included a school (n = 1), community center (n = 1), and religious spaces designed for community use (e.g., church fellowship hall, n = 7). Most locations and sites were selected based on prior engagement or ongoing service with our community collaborators.

Participant recruitment. Participants were recruited via advertising on social media, email, local radio or local newspapers, and personal invitation. Our recruitment message was: *We are convening a group of community members to discuss how we can work together to make progress on important social issues – and we want to hear from you!* As these were public events, participation was open to any interested individual. The design of the partnership focused on convening community members from both within and beyond in

order to extend each organization's respective network. An intentional decision was made by the partners not to collect demographic information of participants. Collecting additional information was seen as an undue burden and barrier to full participation. For each location, targeted invitations were made to community leaders and volunteers holding formal and informal roles within local non-profits, businesses, churches, social services, and other groups.

Researchers' positionalilty. We (authors) were co-investigators and co-instructors of the civic leadership course, and therefore negotiated multiple roles in relation to the project goals. We were located in both formal spaces of the local land-grant university and community-based organizations. I (Kliewer, first author) am an active transportation advocate with BikeWalkMHK, an active transportation advocacy group in town, and serve on a leadership committee for the Flint Hills Wellness Coalition. I am a White, able-bodied man who presents gender in a way that can simultaneously be recognized within the dominant cultural register of rural Kansas and rejected for engaging in activities that queer traditional values of the heartland.

My (Priest, second author) connections with local faith communities and service organizations helped to foster relationships with sites and recruit potential participants. As an able-bodied, White woman who was raised in a rural community not far from the sites, I was able to recognize and connect to local cultural ideas and behaviors. At the same time, my role as a faculty member and researcher positioned me as a community outsider.

As instructors, we sought to utilize a pedagogy of practice (Ganz & Lin, 2012), which is an educational form in which students learn leadership by engaging in the practices of civic leadership (e.g., deliberative civic engagement). Students' learning and development was not the *outcome* of community engagement, but was enacted through the *process of* engagement. As partners, we sought to create an inclusive leadership learning community by way of people (e.g., students, organizations, and community members) and place (e.g., within our classroom and in public spaces of engagement). Our approach aligned with what Mitchell (2008) described as critical-service learning, in which student development and community change are integrative and attentive to dimensions of power, privilege, and systems.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the nine community conversations. At the beginning of each conversation, we gathered consent to collect written documents and photos generated during the event. If participants did not provide consent, then their documents and photos were not collected or included in the study.

We adapted Ganz's (2010, 2011) model of public narrative (i.e., story of self, story of us, story of now) into a four-stage storytelling process that was facilitated by the leadership student participants (see also Kliewer & Priest, 2016 for a detailed description of method). The public narrative process as method is designed to create the conditions for "catalytic validity," what Lather (1986) described as "the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in ... knowing reality in order to better transform it" (p. 67).

The conversation began in small groups, where participants answered the question, "When have you demonstrated or observed leadership for change?" by telling a short story (e.g., story of self). Then, participants surfaced themes around common issues, values, and processes (e.g., story of us). Next, participants represented their "story of us" in an embodied form through story statues (see Leonard, 2013 for examples of applied theater).

Finally, participants created a civic leadership action plan, called their "next story," which represented the intersection of (a) a cause the participants cared about, (b) a role they held (formal or informal), and (c) an action they could take through that role to exercise leadership (i.e., make progress) on the cause. These "next stories" represented participants' present commitment to civic leadership activity necessary for creating change.

Of the 140 participants, 98 individuals consented to share their civic leadership plan as part of the study. Each next story was collected and transcribed into a master excel file for the purpose of coding and analysis. The student and faculty facilitators and participant observers each wrote detailed, systematic, and reflective field notes that were uploaded to the course management site. All the tear sheets and images from the conversation were archived in the master file. Upon completion of all data collection, the documents were organized and uploaded into a qualitative research management program.

Data Analysis

Consistent with our data collection process, we utilized collaborative approaches in our analysis that allowed for multiple interpretations and co-creation of meaning between us as instructor-researchers, our students, and our community collaborators. Informal analysis began *in situ* as we participated in the process by making observations that were recorded through field notes. Written field notes represent the transformation of relational interactions and witnessed events into data, through interpretation and sense-making

(Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Students utilized their field notes, course discussion notes, and community members' "next stories" to create various forms of scholarship within the scope of the course (e.g., an end of semester presentation to our stakeholders). We (authors) extended the data analysis through a more systematic approach. First, we reviewed all of the transcribed next-stories in context with the field notes, group themes, and pictures generated from each community conversation. Our initial coding utilized *a priori* codes that aligned with our categories of data (i.e., cause, role, and action steps) and conceptual framework. Throughout our analysis we also made note of emergent concepts that were added to our coding framework. Following a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) we compared each piece of data against other examples within and across the categories to generate broader interpretive and descriptive themes. We then integrated themes through grouping, discussing patterns, and diagramming (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We used peer debriefing to reach thematic alignment (Saldaña, 2009). At various points throughout the process, we invited our partners to provide their sense of the new understandings generated by the data. This included both a formal presentation by students as a form of member-checking as well as utilization of data in board training sessions as a way to reflect on and integrate learning into strategic planning.

Findings

Our analysis yielded four primary themes. In response to the first research question, "How did participants perceive their role in community change efforts?", we identified themes: (a) leadership through positional roles and (b) raising awareness as a focus of leadership activity. In response to the research question, "What do these perceptions reveal about dispositions that help or inhibit collective leadership activity?", we identified two additional themes: (c) emphasis on individual service and (d) a recognized need for collaboration. These themes highlight a gap between reality and aspirations as well as perceived personal and organizational barriers to a collective work.

Leadership through Positional Roles

Analysis of "next stories" revealed that participants self-identified as holding positions of leadership/influence in local groups and organizations. Some examples of "roles" of leadership and/or community influence included *leader, manager, coach, coordinator, administrator, director, pastor, facilitator, teacher, and council member*. One student facilitator observed in their field note:

Although the turnout was fantastic, I still think we need to figure out a way to get the members of the community there that we are always talking about. I would love to hear their side of the story and be able to empower them to become leaders of the community. Right now, I feel like we are hearing from leaders who are in the community already. Hearing from the leaders is beneficial but I would also love to hear the perspective from those who are struggling. (Student Field Note, County 1, Site 3)

In many cases, participants expressed perceptions of their role that focused on individual authority and failed to speak to ways in which their work was interconnected to others in the community. Very few participants (including *leaders*) pointed to change activities that included collectives or collaborative change strategies.

Raising Awareness as a Focus of Leadership Activity

Building on perceptions of formal role, the next theme highlights participants' perceptions of how one would engage to make change in community. Participants' perceptions of collective work often hinged on elevating general awareness of public problems. As noted in the theoretical framework, Berger (2011) defined a conception of civic engagement as including balanced elements of attention to and action towards addressing public issues. Participants often described their current and potential leadership activity from the attention-focused side of engagement. This was evidenced by the use of language like "awareness" and "advocacy." One facilitator noted in her field note:

There was a realization that despite intense focus [with] a small group of citizens, much of the community is not aware of how community issues impact others. Participants called for space and opportunities to learn, explore, and advocate for the well-being of the community. The participants left the community conversation process indicating next steps included in valuing others in ways that increase awareness of local issues. The participants felt that more diffused understanding of the issue would help the community prepare for the type of availability and adaptability needed to make progress. (County 1, Site 4)

In participants' statements of "next stories," the focus was often on attention-raising actions. Examples included:

- raising awareness and education of [organizational] resources (County 1, Site 3),
- get the word out to more people in need about services available (County 1, Site 4),
- share info through social media, attend rally at Capitol (County 2), and
- facilitate a poverty simulation and invite the community to participate (County 5).

The language of awareness may be reflective of participants' past experiences engaging public problems. Raising awareness involves others, but it can be done in isolation *for* others versus *with* others. Awareness does not explicitly require collective and cooperative relationships.

Emphasis on Individual Service

Themes one and two reveal that when sense of self, role, and civic engagement fails to recognize relational and political dimensions of collective work, dispositions towards civic engagement tend to demonstrate an emphasis towards individual service. When asked to identify "next steps" actions to make progress on a cause they cared about, participants shared examples like:

- keep volunteering, involvement, passion (County 1, Site 4),
- find groups in community that need volunteers (County 4), and
- get involved in afterschool program. (County 2).

Participants generally identified civic actions (past and future) that operate within a charity framework. Community service activity that exists within a charity paradigm is defined as being "generally limited in time and makes limited claims about impact on people involved" (Morton, 1995, p. 21). When operating from a charity paradigm of service, there is limited understanding of root causes and limited investment in developing the types of civic associations necessary for collective action. One tension that emerged from our deliberative civic engagement forums was a significant focus on activities individualized to a single person and that had a heavy focus on instances of service, volunteerism, and helping others. Our third theme, an emphasis on individual service, highlights the relationship between perceptions of collective work and the dispositions called upon to advance change work.

A Recognized Need for Collaboration

Even though participants' actions represented an individual service paradigm, their aspirations for change called for collaborative action. In instances where participants did point to activity that included a focus on systems and forms of collective action, there was a general recognition for additional capacity building efforts. For example, participants reported a need for creating individual and organizational connections, effort toward building relationships, and increased capacity to improve policy, procedures, and practices that support collaboration. Reimagining capacity building efforts to support collaborations were seen in student field notes:

There was a clear commitment in the community conversations to rethink the way community organizations interact with community members. Participants were calling for structures that prepared the community with new skills, behaviors, dispositions, that would support innovative problem solving and action. The group felt that inclusive collaboration is essential for all of the efforts to be successful. (County 1, Site 3)

Participants repeatedly cited collaboration as a key leadership activity associated with positive change. For example,

The conversation surfaced the ... areas that individuals would need to possess in order to be successful in community work ... enhancement of community capacity, commitments to collaboration, discovering new potential within each other, and more dynamic ways to identify need within the [local] community. (County 2)

There was an interest in creating relationships/social connections/community. This was a notion that improves the ability to work in teams and collaborate was essential to address community issues. This process was understood in the context of replacing privilege in a way that helped progress. (County 3)

These field note passages offer insight into the kinds of collective leadership activity that creates the conditions to close the gap between the need for collaboration and the process of connection and collaboration. We found subtle distinctions between the need for collaboration in the community and the process of collaboration as important to community change. However, participants also identified barriers to collaboration at multiple levels.

Individual barriers. Community members pointed to individualized barriers to collaborative work. Of concern was participants' sense of self- and civic-efficacy, or belief that their individual actions can impact change in their communities. Individuals shared that "they don't know what to do;" others recognized that there was a need to talk with neighbors about important community issues related to difference (e.g., race, gender, class). However, the inability to understand difference, engage unusual voices, and have the capacity to work with multicultural groups and across class divisions prevented collective work from taking place. As a result, some community members reported feelings of isolation and alienation from various sub-groups within the community.

Organizational barriers. Participants pointed to organizational and structural behaviors that created barriers to collaboration. The context of organizational collaboration was hindered by the notion of scarcity. First, participants' stories suggested a limited amount of time, energy, and resources available to address community issues – and an inherent competition for these resources. For example, several participants expressed concern that collaboration with other organizations could be viewed as being in competition with their individual organizational purpose. There was a concern that the types of collaboration necessary for collective action may lead to questions from external stakeholders about how funds and resources are allocated within community organizations. Second, collaboration could reveal that community resources were being depleted in ways that served the interests of the organizations, but not the broader community. The emergence of these tensions point to structural barriers that might prevent leadership activity that supports collective work.

Discussion and Conclusion

Community members' perceptions and disposition towards collective leadership activity serve as a marker for developmental readiness to exercise collective forms of leadership. Attending to developmental readiness at an individual-level ensures that university-community partnerships interested in developing leadership can also define collective learning outcomes. How individuals perceive their own role, their perspectives on leadership, motivations to enact leadership activity, and their understanding of formal and informal authority shape both individual and collective capacities. University-community partners interested in enabling the conditions for collective change work ought to contextualize learning and development efforts within a broader outcomes framework that includes both individual- and collective-level outcomes. If collective work is required, individual and intergroup capacity must be taken into account when defining measures of success (Trickett, 1984).

The dominant orientation to leadership learning and development focuses on individuals by assuming (a) that leadership can be broken apart into the parts of leaders, followers, and shared purpose (Drath et al., 2008); and (b) that leadership development can be removed from real-world context (Raelin, 2016). Our findings lead us to question if leadership learning and development approaches operating from the dominant, individual-focused orientation are situated to prepare community for associational life and collective leadership activity.

Paradigm Shift: From Individual to Collective Leadership Learning and Development

Leadership activity that enables associational life must cultivate forms of civic engagement that encourage alignment with democratic practices and public participation. For example, a traditional organizational paradigm of leadership learning and development emphasizes the positional roles of "leaders" and how they influence "followers," and "shared purposes" (Drath et al., 2008, p. 635). However, this leadership lens may be insufficient for community capacity building efforts that seek to support democracy and associational life. A collective lens is required. For example, when designing a community leadership intervention (e.g., formal or informal training, deliberative process, community committees or boards), it is important to select not only high-potential individuals already holding leadership roles but to build a cohort representative of the diversity within the community. Cohorts might be selected across different faction groups, to include different positional types, and will build networks required to influence social, political, and economic institutions.

Our community-based inquiry demonstrates that it is not enough to only disrupt perceptions of leadership that are tied to formal role. Our findings challenge the assumption that someone holding a formal role

was already engaging in leadership activity that supported collective work. This highlights a tension surfaced around the community conversations: if many of our participants only saw their capacity to exercise civic leadership in ways that was connected to formal role, what is required to create capacity to support associational life and leadership activity that relied solely on informal authority.

Morton's (1995) typology of service and Ospina et al.'s (2012) proposed leadership activities of social change organizations provides a frame to consider larger implications of this community-based inquiry. Morton's (1995) framework suggested that university-community partnerships tend to use charity and volunteerism opposed to systemic social change. The implications of this project draw parallels between the dynamics that lead collective efforts to slip towards a focus on individuals and systemic change efforts that pivot towards service and charity paradigms. Reframing discourse, bridging difference, and unleashing human energies are leadership practices that advance social change (Ospina et al., 2012). Leadership practices enacted through a collective frame can produce learning and development that are necessary for civic life. Clearly articulating this insight in the study has implications for the design of leadership learning and development. If the objective is systems change, the leadership learning and development program should be designed to achieve appropriate outcomes.

Leadership Learning and Development has a Political Dimension

Leadership learning and development programming committed to systems change would need to include developing political systems and power within the programmatic experience. This represents another paradigm shift – instead of conceptualizing the leadership learning and development programming as a matter of individual skill development, it would also have to include a direct focus on building political power and navigating contestation in productive ways. Leadership learning and development experiences must acknowledge political dimensions of the work if the focus is on systemic change (Bess, Prilleltensky, Perkins, & Collins, 2009; Kivel, 2009). Re-imagining the operations of systems is inherently tied up in how people negotiate power and choice. Recognizing political dimensions of leadership learning and development requires a paradigm shift from individual-level considerations to the level of systems (Kivel, 2009). Recognizing political dimensions inherent to leadership learning and development efforts impacts how participants construct leadership identities and the overall design of programming.

Including an explicit focus on political systems and building political power would be a departure from community leadership programs that often emphasize networking and skill-development. When leadership developers and community members design leadership learning and development experiences intended to produce systems change, they must include an explicit account of politics – power and choice. Leadership activity must be situated within a larger collective capacity to account for power connected to systems and to unpack the conditions that either enables or constrains the range of choice available to those attempting to navigate the system in question. The political dimensions of leadership are attached meaning through the ways power operates and the range of choice available to those within a given system.

University-community partnerships working to advance leadership learning and development must account for power, choice, and systems when designing programming. The data from the community forums revealed a tension. On the one hand, participants were charged to engage in deliberation that focused on determining what is required to make positive change in and within community. However, when pushed to surface specific activities of change much of the focus was limited to the individual acts of charity. When community members did speak to a need for collaboration, both individual and organizational barriers undermined collective work.

We found that the partnership process was not only a practice of learning, but an opportunity to exercise leadership with community to develop capacities necessary for social change leadership (Ganz, 2010; Ospina et al., 2012; Raelin, 2016). The cutting edge work for university-community partnership is defining frameworks and outcomes that are truly meeting the learning and development goals of individuals (i.e., community members, students, faculty) but, at the same time, are not undermining the potential for collective change work to occur in meaningful ways. The leadership learning and development process should be designed to support those that desire the world as it ought to be, not just what is currently possible. Orientations to university-community partnerships that acknowledge political dimensions of partnership require that objectives be reimagined through a different set of paradigmatic assumptions.

Our study highlights a need to intentionally match aspirational outcomes of university-community partnerships with the developmental readiness of community members engaging in partnership work. The use of deliberative civic engagement processes was an activity of leadership. Future scholarship should intentionally consider how methods of collaboration serve as components of leadership learning and development within university-community partnerships, and how they play a crucial role advancing collective change

activity. University-community partnerships that deepen capacity for collective work will provide meaningful leadership learning and development opportunities as well as intentionally recognize and remove barriers that prevent meaningful collaboration.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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