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Monograph Series

LEADERSHIP: VOLUME 1

Public Leadership and Change: A Community Leadership Education Framework

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SUPPORT CENTER FOR NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

CONSULTING ■ TRANSITION MANAGEMENT ■ TRAINING
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INVESTING IN EMERGING NONPROFIT LEADERS

Don Crocker, *Executive Director*
The Support Center for Nonprofit Management

As nonprofit leaders from the Baby Boom generation approach retirement or move on to other endeavors, a new generation of emerging leaders is stepping up to take their place. Some new nonprofit leaders are crossing over from the corporate sector, others are coming directly from college and university programs, and still others are emerging as social entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and community leaders, taking on causes that reflect their personal passions. Some are filling the shoes of outgoing leaders and others are starting their own organization, programs, or new ventures.

Regardless of where our new leaders are coming from, most experts agree that in order for the nonprofit sector to be successful in addressing the core human and social challenges facing our society, significant investment is needed. We aren't just talking about financial investment. Our emerging leaders are looking for new ways of thinking, unique models for change, technological resources, the time and energy of cooperating partners and volunteers, and opportunities for learning, brainstorming, networking, and conducting research.

The environment in which nonprofit leaders work today is significantly different from that of the 1960s and 1970s, when most Baby Boomers entered the sector. Today there is more competition within the sector and, in some cases, nonprofits are now competing with for-profit organizations for resources and funding. Nonprofit organizations that provide essential human and social services also face growing concerns around accountability and measurable outcomes on the part of donors and other funding sources.

There is no "one way" to invest in our emerging leaders. In fact, there are many ways to invest, including: mentoring, coaching, professional development, creating new opportunities for growth and learning, and trying out new ideas to see what works best in our constantly changing environment.

At the Support Center, our goal is to be a place for such exploration and growth. We welcome emerging leaders from all communities and encourage you to let us know what you need to be successful. The monograph series is just one way that we are promoting new thinking and research in our field. We encourage you to let us know your thoughts, submit your research for publication, and suggest ways we can do better at sharing new thinking and promoting learning in our sector.



I hope you find benefit in reading this monograph series. Please write me and let me know how we can best support your energy and ideas. You can email me at: dc@supportcenteronline.org. I look forward to seeing you or hearing from you soon!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Crocker". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Don Crocker

PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE: A COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

James O. Bates¹, is a career federal government employee and Adjunct Faculty at SUNY at Buffalo.



One of the basic tenets of a leadership development program is that leaders are people that make things happen by motivating individuals and groups to achieve more than they might have otherwise. Whether turning around a failing organization, mobilizing public action to solve a neighborhood problem, or leading a nation through a crisis, leaders can be found communicating vision and the value of a set course-of-actions to followers, gathering resources for the purpose of taking action, and taking action. In light of this, community leadership programs must teach participants methods for formalizing the process of implementing programs and acquiring political, social, and economic resources to produce desired social outcomes. While knowing how to implement social programs is an important part of leadership, understanding the processes of garnering and sustaining resources is essential (Moore, 1995; Heifetz, 2002; Northouse, 2004).

Two basic leadership theories can be used to frame this developmental proposition. They are path-goal and leader-member exchange. Path-goal is an organizational theory that attempts to explain how leaders motivate subordinates to be productive and satisfied by relating leader behaviors to the characteristics of subordinates and project tasks. It is derived from research on the notion that employees will be motivated if they feel that they are able to accomplish their tasks, their efforts will be supported, and the *pay-off* from their work is valuable (Northouse 2004). Specifically, it demonstrates how achievement-oriented, participatory,

and directive leadership styles impact the productivity and work satisfaction of subordinates.

Leader-member exchange is an organizational theory that views leadership as a process centered on the leader-follower relationship. Researchers have found that high quality exchanges between leaders and followers result in followers feeling better, accomplishing more, and helping the organization to thrive. Both theories go on to explain how leader behavior impacts organizational outputs, and ultimately, organizational outcomes.

What these theories hold for public leadership practice is that effective leaders must push to realize a shared vision for action within the organization as well as from the public. What they also hold for practice, when combined with policy-making, is that leaders must not only learn how to communicate the *meaning* of action but also learn how organizational characteristics, strategy, and program implementation – with emphasis on working with authorizers, political agents, the media, and public interest groups – integrate to form policy choice and frame the constraints of public decision-making and action.

A PUBLIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

While there have been many scholarly debates about the competencies required to influence policy decisions and understand political agendas, it is believed that problem solving, situation awareness, negotiation, communication, and political management skills are hallmark. But how do these traits coalesce to assist leaders to produce envisioned change? In the context of social output production, leaders ply their skills through institutional arrangements that integrate

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Table 1: Strategic Alignment / Production Possibility Transaction Matrix

		RESOURCES	
		+	-
COMPETENCE	+	Operational Shift	Shareholder/Authorizer/ Institution Alignment
	-	External Alliance/ Coercion Innovation	Strategy Gap

**LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE
AREA**

resources like tax dollars, technically savvy staff, and legislation to produce desired social goods or services. For example, a skillful police chief can apply new legislation and tax-dollars to his/her department's detective unit to solve more crimes and therefore increase public safety. The output might be more detectives, the introduction and use of new technology, and stricter laws for criminals, while the outcome will be fewer criminals on the street committing crimes. The leader, as part of the visioning and value testing phase of a social proposition, must estimate the competencies and resource mix required to produce desired outputs. In government agencies and private corporations this is rationalized through the budget process.

As illustrated in *Table 1*, resource and competence endowments must be considered when calculating social production possibilities and the strategic alignments required to insure production. While production resources like land, labor, political capital, social capital, technology, and dollars are widely understood for their roles in a transaction or production process, institutional competencies are less explicitly understood for their role. Institutions are any form of arrangement that bring people together for goal and task achievement. This includes such arrangements as ad hoc voluntary neighborhood groups, paid volunteer groups, private and public corporations, and government entities. Things like group ability and willingness to learn, adaptability, ability to manage organi-

zational stress, technical ability, and motivation denote institutional competence.

Under the general model illustrated in *Table 1*, when a leader has assessed a social problem within the context of organizational goals, defined what is to be accomplished, and is ready to take action, production of a valued social outcome is most probable when *competencies and resources are abundant* and least probable when they are absent. Albeit, the lack of resources does not mean that social production is not possible. Leaders are merely challenged to orient existing groups and institutions toward a specific vision and set of tasks, and create the operating environment and community synergy required for the effort. Per the model, one only need realign organizational priorities and processes to achieve desired outputs in a resource and competence rich environment and conversely, in a *resource and competence poor environment*, one must almost reinvent the organization, develop strategic alliances, test the social value propositions, and gain new financial and legislative authority to achieve the social goal.

For an operational shift to occur, one must orient people and resources toward the desired outcomes and the client population to be served, a conceptual framework that describes what success will look like, the specific metrics to be used to evaluate success, and the institutional implications of the changes on procedures, resources, and people.

This can be managed through new strategic and operating plans, and support training.

In a *resource rich but competence deficient environment*, one has to develop external alliances in addition to aligning operational priorities and resources to achieve desired outputs. A leader may also promote the use of technology or other innovations to compensate for the competence deficiency. In order for an innovation to be introduced, there must be a disruption of institutional processes and routines that reinforce existing arrangements for delivering benefits. This may be challenging as institutions routinize practices in order to reduce costs, resource misallocations, and system distress. While the arrangements allow an institution to decrease the overall production cost of an output through a repetitive production process, the inertia caused by this process also hinders organizational learning and the ability of group members to react to a change in consumer needs. In these instances, a leader must use past institutional experiences and routines to conceptually map-out the new situation and the actions to be taken, as a result of new information, to overcome the new challenges and obstacles. While this new conceptual map may be met with resistance, leaders should be able to illustrate how the new situation will not be addressed by current practices and will require institutional adaptation and change. Institutional adaptation and change can materialize as either collaboration/coercion of an external partner or product/process innovation. By example, if a national environmental action group once produced grassroots community policy/issue campaign training seminars on VHS tapes but is confronted with a shrinking market for video training products, the firm may choose to produce real-time training seminars in streaming online video to capture new market opportunities. In this scenario, while the firm could consider continuing the use of existing processes, the outcome would ultimately be the loss of influence and eventual shutdown. By repackaging the core content in a new medium, the organization renews the range of products and services it produces by creating a com-

pletely new line of products and services – in order to secure the future of the group. By contrast, the firm can outsource the distribution component of the work to a technically savvy firm and refocus its core efforts on content and client development. This type of collaboration allows the firm to access skills that are not current in the organization while allowing it to continue building its core competence.

In a *competence rich and resources deficient environment*, one has to shift the operating priorities and acquire new resources to produce a desired outcome. Production resources include traditional assets like land, labor, political capital, social capital, technology, and dollars and nontraditional social “cohesion” ones like tolerance and trust. The leveraging of nontraditional resources is common in situations where experimentation and adaptation is required to solve a problem. For example, as with many health-related social problems, solutions are not always readily identifiable. Leaders require the public to grant them authority and resources for experimentation and a degree of tolerance for the real time learning that will be required to solve the problem. Concomitantly, public organizations require legislators and other authorizers to provide ongoing resources for solving problems when solutions are not forthcoming. This was recently evidenced in the 2005 bird flu epidemic.

Although U.S. residents had not yet been affected by bird flu, public leaders mobilized resources for research and development, and a vaccine distribution network for the problem – referring to the problem as a *pandemic*. In order to do this, public leaders released stories about the problem to the public, convened national and international public health scholars to discuss the implications of the problem on human habitats, and set-aside funds. As a result of this and other communication efforts, President Bush was able to garner public support for committing resources to addressing this problem and aligned the U.S. with the world community – to solve it – despite the general public’s lack of knowledge of the true impact of the flu and the lack of a vaccine.

TRANSACTION STRATEGY EXPLAINED

While some models presume that leaders must possess certain basic traits to create change, the transaction model presumes that leaders must have a basic framework for orienting institutions and resources toward goal accomplishment, and that group and organizational behavior are already part of the critical decision-making lens being used in conjunction with communication principles to convey the intrinsic value of social production solutions. This does not mean that personal traits and an understanding of such things as the culture of an organization and the downstream political consequences of decisions are not important; it merely presumes that these matters should be viewed in the context of mission, tasks, and endowments. By example, if an institution has the competencies and resources to produce something of public value that is also consistent with its mission, then a leader should have to merely externalize that value and insure that it is taken up by the broader organization and manifest as an actionable item: a new widget, a campaign, a policy. This would require the leader to understand what is of value to the institution and political marketplace, communicate the value of the proposed solutions to relevant constituents, and mirror the values in framing the action-choices and anticipated outcomes.

In a government agency, this could manifest as a revised business plan in which managers and staff are encouraged to translate a new direction into concrete measurable actions. An agency that produces housing may decide to also produce homeless shelters or homebuyer education. An agency that produces crime prevention services may also decide to produce youth leadership or community policing activities. In a volunteer group such as neighborhood crime watch, this could manifest as a new action item to promote other quality of life initiatives. In either instance, the new value might be framed as a new

initiative that is consistent with the existing mission and institutional capacity. Task participants would be persuaded to understand that the new goal is to be accomplished with little more than an operational reorientation and shift of resources.

In situations where resources and competencies are lacking, like in some fledgling organizations, inner city neighborhoods, or developing countries, leaders may be forced to create a public preference for an action by demonstrating how a current policy, practice, or state of affairs is not for the common good and does not reflect a value that is upheld by the community. This inconsistency is then used as a vision and positioning point to garner allies, and internal and external support for a course of action for the common good. A leader, through the framing of issues and actions to different constituent groups being sought to give an agenda traction, tests the value proposition of a proposal. The leader's ability to garner support and authority to take action validates the proposition. An example of this can be seen when neighborhood groups form, as a result of one person, in areas where resident associations are absent, and local legislators and police are forced by the mobilized citizenry to make the area safer and more livable. For this type of situation, a strategic challenge, a leader must use the principles outlined in the three sections of the matrix in combination with the principles of agenda-setting to insure broad public awareness and support for the social action and values it represents.

CONCLUSION

Although the model does not address many of the major questions that surround leadership development, it does point to the importance of organizational arrangements, task characteristics, developmental constraints, and strategic alliances in framing a social agent's choice of action. ■

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