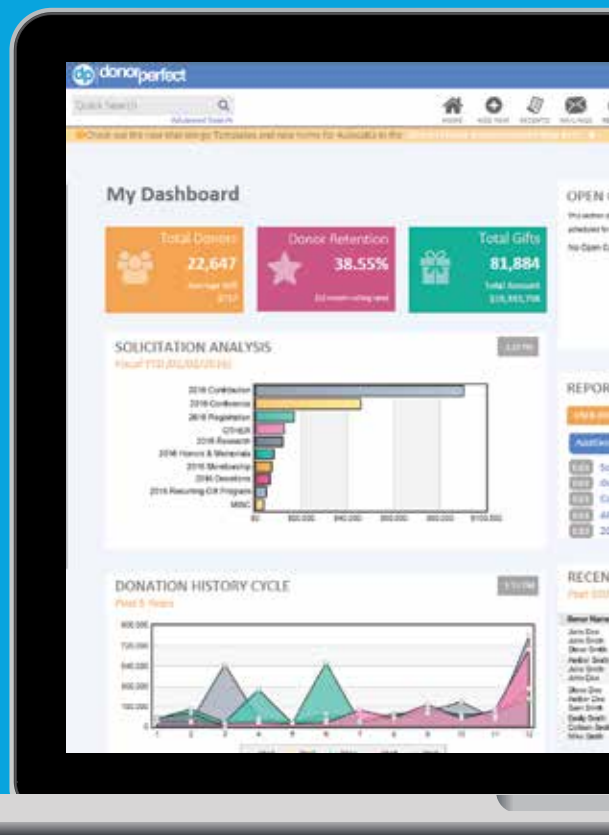# THE
Nonprofit
QUARTERLY

Advancing

Critical

Conversations:

How to

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from *Here*

Bell and Adams *on* Shared Leadership

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Department

Welcome

DEAR READERS,

This issue is structured differently from our usual format. Instead of a collection of features followed by a mix of what we call "department" or "back end" articles, we have prepared three collections of features, meant to illustrate a core component of our work at the *Nonprofit Quarterly*—that of advancing critical conversations in civil society and among nonprofits and philanthropy. We rarely run an article that is not meant to illuminate a topic and also drive understanding and practice forward in this important sector; but we are foregrounding this practice here, because in the coming year we want to more intentionally orient ourselves around what we can do to cause shifts in practice to occur—to unstick things, so to speak—in the sector's work.

This orientation drives our choices of content, partners, and venues. These past five years, as the research began to emerge about diversity or lack thereof in the leadership of the sector, we began partnering with a number of other groups to consider what we needed to do to "unstick" the situation—to put the sector's feet to the fire and track change efforts and results to more effectively help advance diversity. This work has taken—and will continue to take—many forms, including a set of case studies of board transformation that we will be producing in concert with BoardSource over the next year.

So, you could think of the *Nonprofit Quarterly* as a series of such conversations being advanced bit by bit by nonprofit leaders, academics, and *NPQ* staff. Our job, primarily, is to curate all of what is being said about a thing and to lift up what we think are the promising and credible ideas. Over time, we often pursue a topic with articles by a mix of academics and practitioners, along with case studies that are reflected in online features and newswires by readers experimenting with the practice in question on the ground. Periodically, research topics come up that add other data points, and we cover those as well, always linking from one piece to another. Thus, a research-to-practice bridge is created at the same time that the conversation is advanced.

We generally have a number of partners in these advancement endeavors, and they are always who we see as being the best sense makers in the field. And we are always looking for more of those.

But lifting up the promising ideas sometimes means having to drown out the common knowledge and misplaced fads and fashions that might drive ambitious, grounded thinking off course—and the unlearning and debunking of wrongheaded models and practices can take up an enormous amount of time and effort. As they say, "It's not what you don't know that kills you; it's what you do know that ain't so."

The Nonprofit Whisperer

When joining a board, put effort into learning about the collective board culture before you begin tackling big issues. If the issue is succession planning/leadership transition, then whether you are new to the board or not, take the time to do a careful and strategic process that honors the transition and makes room for the right leader.

DEAR NONPROFIT WHISPERER, *I am a new board member of a thirtyish-year-old, struggling nonprofit. All but one member (the sole employee on the board) believe that our executive director is God's gift to the organization. My province is governance, and I would like to introduce the issue of ED succession planning to the board. Our ED is a nonvoting ex officio board member and should (in my view) be a major player in designing an approach, a policy, and, ideally, a procedure vis-à-vis this issue.*

What is the best way for me to introduce this idea to the board without making the ED feel threatened and/or most of the board feel it's a waste of time and something to be delayed until we aren't so overwhelmed? Truth is, what the board is overwhelmed by is its habit of micromanaging, which frequently leads to contradictions apropos of even the smallest decision made by the ED.

Worried

Dear Worried,

It is hard to join a board with an entrenched culture, and talking about succession planning can definitely be a thorny issue. I have sat on a number of boards over the last thirty years, and the short answer to your question is: start with a sensible request for procedures for unplanned absence (emergency) and planned absence (family leave) to be established. Such procedures are typically part of any succession plan and help to ease the topic into the conversation. (And yes, the ED should take the first stab at designing the procedures.) Hopefully, awareness, knowledge, and trust will develop as that work happens, enabling the next steps toward succession planning for permanent departures.

In truth, fewer than 50 percent of nonprofits have succession plans, because succession is such a difficult topic. Among people who work in the field of succession planning, the conversation has shifted toward building a sustainable organization as the best way to ensure a sound transition. Succession planning is now treated as a piece of that process, not the be-all and end-all. Which brings us to the long answer: you can help to grow sustainability by supporting the board in developing so that it is more strategic and less involved in micromanaging. That is the long game, and it will help build the organization in such a way that the topic of succession will naturally be entwined with conversations about staff development and distributed leadership.

Keep in mind that no two boards are alike, and when new to a board it can be a good idea to take stock for the first few meetings (or first six months) and analyze the collective culture of the board and where and how you can make a significant contribution (unless there is something egregious needing immediate action). It sounds as though you have the capacity to pinpoint areas for needed organizational growth and development, but other board members may have to be brought along to recognize the same need for change. So, before tackling other issues, consider working on enriching the soil for governance by taking a few small process steps that will help the board get out of its micromanagement habit. Shifting this behavior would be a major contribution and set the scene for future growth and for tackling more strategic issues.

Put another way, I have found that no matter how much perspective, knowledge, or how many skills I might bring when I join a board, boards are in essence minisystems, and systems are best influenced by applying the right lever at the right time. Typically, that lever is a "precondition," or step, for bigger change, and it often involves procedural tweaks. Once the smaller changes take hold (in the case of your board, this would be less micromanagement), then the ability to have more generative, strategic conversation grows, and the board can work

to tackle important stuff—like succession planning—within a strengthened boardroom context. Governance guru Bill Ryan describes the importance of the board-meeting agenda as one of those levers: simply making time for strategic conversations and not having pro forma committee reports take up the entire meeting can be a game changer. Using inquiry—leading with questions—versus answers and prescriptions can also create a change in board culture, as a question leads to a conversation and can create a habit of critical thinking.

In other words, you may want to back into the succession planning conversation by simply asking some questions. You could start with questions about why the board is micromanaging (when you see this habit playing out in real time). You could use your governance role to ask other board members what they feel they need to learn in order to practice good governance—or you could introduce an assessment tool for them to fill out that points out what good governance looks like (succession planning should be on the checklist). When you have gained some cachet with the board, you can also help members lean into a conversation about overall sustainability by starting with the role governance plays (a role that involves building a healthy pipeline for new, diverse, skilled board members).

Once the board has taken care of its own succession planning, it will become quite natural to have this conversation at the staff level. If you are concerned that handling the conversation at both board and staff levels would consume a three- or six-year tenure on the board, you could simply lead with (or layer in) a conversation about whether the organization has enough bench strength at the staff level or is overly reliant on one leader—and if the latter is the case, how the board can help get to more sustainability in terms of its human capital.

Dear Nonprofit Whisperer,
Most of us know there is a wide range of boards—some more effective and healthy than others. But the majority of boards do not understand the need for adequate time lines for leadership transition and are more likely than not to rush a nonprofit leadership or transition solution in order to check the issue off their list. My question is, how can an organization/ED get the board to understand that a longer time line is critical?
Concerned Board Member

Dear Concerned,
There is the saying "go slow to go fast." A leader I spoke with recently told me that for the second time in her working life, she had panicked about hiring a manager and had rushed it through—an expensive mistake, as time spent hiring, onboarding, and letting go a new high-level staff person within three months is resource intensive and disruptive. For even a small nonprofit, a board should plan on at least six to eight months from the time an executive director announces his or her departure to the time when a new leader arrives. For larger, complex organizations, plan on a year or so.

The *Nonprofit Quarterly* has been publishing articles on executive transition for many years, and I am not going to repeat the steps of a good executive transition here except to say that a board should never rush to a search and hire, as these are actually the middle steps of a sound executive transition process.[1] A board's first step should be to assess where the organization is now and where it thinks it will be in five years, and then create a vision statement around that. A "transition" or "search" committee can then develop a leadership profile built around the skills and attributes required to move the organization to its five-year vision—not based on the characteristics of a great departing director or swinging

the pendulum to ensure the weaknesses of a former ED are corrected but rather on the organization's current and near-future vision, strategy, and needs being matched by the right leader with the right skills and attributes.

It is recommended that, if the organization has the resources, it hire an executive-transition consultant to support the board through the process. If the organization has some fires to put out (poor financial status, for example), consider an interim executive director to help steady the helm and make it a more attractive option for potential leaders. Hiring an interim—making sure that he or she is a very competent and knowledgeable one—allows a board the space and time to ensure a good hiring process for its next leader.

Note

1. See, for example, Tom Adams, "Departing? Arriving? Surviving and Thriving: Lessons for Seasoned and New Executives," *Nonprofit Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Winter 2002); the editors, "Letting Go: A Leadership Challenge," July 28, 2017, nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/07/28/letting-go-a-leadership-challenge/; and Jeanne Bell and Tom Adams, "Nonprofit Leadership Transitions and Organizational Sustainability: An Updated Approach that Changes the Landscape," webinar, March 22, 2017, nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/03/22/nonprofit-leadership-transitions-organizational-sustainability-updated-approach-changes-landscape/.

THE NONPROFIT WHISPERER has over thirty years of experience in the nonprofit sector serving variously as nonprofit staff and board member, foundation staff, and nonprofit management consultant.

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Conversations & Change:
The Crucial Link

by Ruth McCambridge

In the endeavor to enact needed change—whether to advance social issues or improve our day-to-day practices in our organizations—it is "the tension between what is and what could be that gives energy to a change effort, and that energy must come from people who own and believe in a common vision because they have worked on its development together."

MOST OF US KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE THAT when important conversations about our work get stuck in avoidant and self-referential loops, it delays our ability to advance social issues and even our day-to-day practices in our organizations. This is a well-tested tenet of systems thinking, which also advises us that in their tendency to resist change, systems often throw up false signals that detour

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"LOS POLITICOS" BY MARGARITA DELEUZE/WWW.DELEUZE.COM

and fatally delay change efforts. This requires that we remain attentive to the content of the conversations that are helping us to advance our work, and distinguish them from those that would retard progress. There is, of course, a good deal of literature about how we can understand and implement change, but much of it will reflect the following basic structure: What we have (contrasted against) what we want—and how to get from here to there.

The Tension between What Is and What Can Be

The structure described above is the basic fractal for a change conversation. You surface the issue and explore it—warts and all—taking responsibility for your part in making it less than desirable. You imagine what an ideal state could be, and then you keep iterating the two elements: "what we want" and "how to get there from here"—the here being ever changing. In the midst of all of that, you take into account that others do not always see the same critical notions, dynamics, and assets that we work with, and it will be up to you to hold them as sacred touch points.

It is the tension between what is and what could be that gives energy to a change effort, and that energy must come from people who own and believe in a common vision because they have worked on its development together.

Thus, part of the strength of the civil sector is in our constant and curious voluntary engagement with one another around practice issues in nonprofits and philanthropy. How do we really "know" a thing well enough to ask the next right question about it? Is our vision held in common with others? And who are those others?

When conversations that are meant to advance our work get stuck, it can take years—even decades—to get them moving again. Clearly, no nonprofit can afford that down time right now, when all around us variables like policies, community demographics, funding sources, and people's expectations of institutions are in tumultuous upheaval. Therefore, the question of how to keep change-oriented conversations moving becomes of utmost importance to this sector, charged as it is with acting in the best

interests of those they purport to serve or represent.

Interrupting Conversations to Nowhere

This edition of the *Nonprofit Quarterly* looks at a few conversations that have been stuck and have just begun to advance again—shared leadership, collective action, and fiscal sponsorship—and at what the dynamics and processes are for initiating and exploring change within the sector. It also looks at what may be blocking the progress of the conversations, making them repetitive, circular, and nonsensical. Other obvious examples are the overhead ratio—which was known to be off base for at least three decades before it was largely shut down (over the past eighteen months or so)—and the ridiculous remonstration that nonprofits should act more like businesses, when it is pretty clear that the trend is headed in the other direction. Both of these conversations have moved along, but only after significant delays.

There are, in fact, any number of other examples of imposed or funder- and government-favored solutions that do not, in the end, work. One programmatic example is the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, a much-lauded network that had police personnel all over the country working with youth to prevent drug abuse. Fortunately, this program was exhaustively studied, and it has largely—although not completely—fallen out of fashion since findings were released indicating that young people in these programs were more likely to abuse drugs than similar control groups not in the program.

But in the cases of D.A.R.E, the overhead ratio, and the push for nonprofits to act more like businesses, it took far too long for our concerns to have an effect, even at the point when most of us realized that the assertions and mandates were more harmful than helpful. Why did these concepts get stuck as givens in this sector for so long? How can we prevent such delays from happening again?

An answer lies in the concept of participatory action research (PAR). Participatory action research seeks to understand the world by trying to change it. It encourages the integration

of various types and sources of knowledge; promotes observation, experimentation, and knowledge sharing; and engages those who are affected by a problem in developing dynamic analyses and approaches. Essentially, it is a political and systems-based way of understanding knowledge-development processes. Among the assumptions on which participatory research is based are two interesting precepts—namely:

- Knowledge can be developed over time by a rich mix of institutions and individuals through their mutual exploration of the realities and possibilities of a situation. But for that knowledge to act successfully in the interests of those most closely affected, *their* knowledge must be central to the sense making. Through these conversations, people seek to comprehend the situation and determine cause–effect relationships; work to make sense of the issue, problem, or opportunity; and move the matter forward. This dialogue "provide[s] an opportunity to (a) examine the assumptions that underlie thinking and to reflect upon the implications of that thinking, (b) develop a common language among participants, and (c) create a shared context in which people learn how to talk to each other."[1]
- Politically and financially privileged interests can often take change-oriented conversations off course by insisting upon a redefinition of issues and possible solutions. These redefinitions are often bad fits with the ways that others understand what is in front of them, and they carry extra weight and can end up driving fields into dead ends that delay progress for long periods.

It is precisely because this sector is so resource dependent that it has a tendency to play to potential or existing funders who very often do not know exactly what they are talking about. Thus, when United Way decided to push particular management orientations in the 1980s and '90s, many community-based organizations felt forced to go along with the unfunded mandates in order to get along with the then-important and influential local funder. Many of these management reforms have since been dropped not only

among nonprofits but also among the corporations where they were born. The problem is, such funder-directed influences can hijack the time and energy needed for the more grounded learning that nonprofits need to do with others. Too often, even the intermediaries established to act as whole-field learning centers get caught up in the same funder-driven endeavors.

Even if we were to manage to run a well-conceived and well-operated nonprofit in one decade, it might appear badly conceived and operated in the next, if the organization does not continue to evolve along with the rest of the world. While some nonprofits have gotten into the habit of deconstructing and either reaffirming or altering their practices in the face of changing circumstances, others must be dragged kicking and screaming into some important facet of current reality that requires them to radically transform their practices on an immediate basis. An example of this is the state of nonprofit long-term care and home-healthcare agencies, which have relied far too long on an underpaid, marginalized, and unsustainable workforce just as the aging population begins a much-predicted expansion. There are alternative structures to those dependent on a starved and unstable workforce, but these are nowhere near developing at the scale that will be needed, leaving workers, seniors, and nonprofits highly vulnerable. Not keeping change-oriented conversations functioning in real time can have real human and social consequences.

When you look through the lens of the pace and style of the conversation, it is remarkable how much you can see in terms of what needs to be changed and why. For instance, the absurd distraction of the overhead argument obscured the need for knowledge of some other critically important interpretive tools for financial management. Such tools would have made nonprofit financial structures a lot easier for boards to manage, and at the same time might have focused funders on operating rather than program grants, and on the benefits of a healthy balance sheet. The red herring of overhead not only used up energy and focus unnecessarily but also robbed needed energy and focus from elsewhere.

Even if we were to manage to run a well-conceived and well-operated nonprofit in one decade, it might appear badly conceived and operated in the next, if the organization does not continue to evolve along with the rest of the world.

But, as with anything else, there is often a nugget of truth in such distractions. The overhead question, for instance, is not completely devoid of relevance—the problem was that it consumed many other things of equal or greater relevance. Similarly, the conversation about shared leadership that you will find elsewhere in this edition has been buried under a bushel of reasonable alarms about transitioning executive leaders. A shift of the lens provides a clearer view of the whole picture, which includes an attachment to a waning heroic-leader ethos that might be replaced with a greater whole.

Nonprofits seem to be getting better at interrupting conversations to nowhere, yet we still spend a great deal of time involved in such conversations beforehand. It might be better to remember that basic construct of the fractal: know what we have, clearly envision what we want, and work that conversation until we get there. Often that will require that we question our own and each others' assumptions and assertions.

• • •

In pursuit of the goal of speeding up the change conversations we are having in this sector, and as our orientation arguably becomes the more dominant frame, I would like to remind readers of the great Donella Meadows's oft-cited twelve leverage points for changing a system. Below are the top six:

6. **The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to information).**
5. **The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints).**
4. **The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure.**
3. **The goals of the system.**
2. **The mindset or paradigm out of which the system—its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters—arises.**
1. **The power to transcend paradigms.**[2]

We can either approach conversations or communication as in service of a change that has been predefined, or we can approach them as part of a collective visioning process that resists any attempt to impose a dominant point of view—electing instead for rigor and discourse attached to collective will. These are vastly different approaches that flow from different views of how the kind of change we want to see can legitimately and with integrity occur. In the kind of complex adaptive system that is the nonprofit sector, one could make an excellent argument that habitual bowing to resource-based power— if we keep taking that subservient role—will quite naturally rob our sector of energy and influence as part and parcel of its loss of democratic principles.

NOTES

1. Henry Mintzberg, Duru Raisinghani, and André Théorêt, "The Structure of 'Unstructured' Decision Processes," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1976): 246–75, www.jstor.org/stable /2392045.

2. Donella Meadows, "Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System," The Donella Meadows Project: Academy for Systems Change, accessed November 30, 2017, donellameadows.org/archives /leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/.

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(1) presented in conjunction with National Endowment for the Arts. (2) Arts Destination Marketing Award, presented in conjunction with Destination Marketing Association International. (3) presented in conjunction with United States Conference of Mayors. (4) presented in conjunction with National Association of Counties. (5) presented in conjunction with National Lieutenant Governors Association. (6) presented in conjunction with National Conference of State Legislatures.

Exploring *the* Practice *of* Shared Leadership

The articles in this section all deal with the topic of shared leadership—and, whether looking at issues of power, engaging in more strategic leadership and organizational transition, or investigating alternative organizational models, the end goal should be leadership practices that— as Bell writes— "reflect your shared beliefs and assumptions about where the world is going or needs to go."

N A SECTOR BUILT ON COLLECTIVE ACTION, IT IS NO surprise that there would be periodic rounds of conversation about how to share leadership. For a time, however, those conversations became almost submerged by a drive to "professionalize"—which has roughly translated into looking and acting as much like a hierarchical corporation as possible. Under this precept, all but the smallest and most informal nonprofits tended to default to the dominant model of the industrial era, with leadership viewed as largely being embodied in positional roles and necessarily a smallish slice of the whole organization.

But in the last forty years, organizations of all kinds have been toying with the idea of making use of the whole of the collective intelligence and energy in and around them, and thinking and practices have advanced fairly quickly. Nonprofits have been paying close attention to such questions as how networked leadership works and where power resides in networks, leading them to significantly reimagine relationships and leadership currency. But even before that, Peter Senge and a number of other mainstream management thinkers were attempting to explicate the practices of collective and sometimes upended organizational leadership. Such practices did not necessarily

take hold in the private sector—where pay grades and the like often get in the way—but some of the experiments were enormously instructive in helping organizations consider how to manage differently and how to make the transition.

More recently, as a new form of digitally based activist organization (change.org and a host of others) took hold, we have also seen a kind of inside-out governance system treat constituents en masse as their guidance systems and action arms all at the same time.

Of course, none of these ideas are new; they are all natural extensions of forms we have played with in civil society for many decades— within, for instance, feminist organizations and community-organizing nonprofits. But trying to interact with the outside world in those forms has not always been easy, since funders and others have tended to cling to a hierarchical, single-hero model of leadership. The conversation about shared leadership has been sidelined for too long and has been slow to get started again. It is also burdened with old assumptions about more singular forms of leadership, but this conversation is greased for speed by the requirements of the information age and by the very purpose of the sector: collective action.

The Leadership Ethos:
How What We Believe Can Inform Our Leadership Practices

by Jeanne Bell

THESE DAYS, EACH MORNING'S NEWS OFFERS US YET another abhorrent reminder that the practice of leadership is anything but neutral. Although often portrayed as such in management literature and popular culture, leadership is not a generic set of behaviors that can be codified and transferred across generations, industries, values sets, or presidents. Instead, leadership is an expression of a group's particular ethos, where ethos is defined as "the fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society; dominant assumptions of a people or period."[1] Clearly, we have a multitude of leadership ethoses coexisting across political parties, industries, and communities in the United States. This is true in the nonprofit sector alone, which at over a million organizations is not of one mind but of many.

When we acknowledge that the practice of leadership is not neutral—that it is not apolitical—we necessarily embrace that nonprofits (that is, the people who work and govern in them) are going to make different leadership choices depending on their values and their politics, whether consciously or not. Moreover, we acknowledge that different leadership practices will create different results (or impacts) at the levels of the individual leader, teams of staff and board, organization, and field or sector, and in communities at large. The opportunity then—some might say the mandate—is twofold: as organizational and movement leaders, we must become conscious of how the practices of leadership we are employing and cultivating in others reflect (or not) the broader ethos of our work; and we must have our ears continuously attuned to how shifts in that broader ethos need to show up in our leadership practices, so that *how* we do our work keeps in step with *what* we want to see change in our organizations and in the world.

As someone with the privilege of engaging in day-to-day leadership practice as an executive director at CompassPoint—and who participates

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in the leadership discourse at the same time (given CompassPoint's work)—I want to lift up some of the permanent shifts in the leadership ethos among progressive organizations that have become (and will continue to be) inspiration for new leadership practices. I am speaking explicitly to progressive organizational contexts, because I am not served—and nor are you, as reader—by rendering opaque the progressive values and politics I bring to this conversation. When we do that (whether as leaders or as leadership commentators), we perpetuate the illusion that we can all be trained to lead "the right way"—to believe that a generic "good leadership" will resonate with everyone.

The Four Leadership Domains

Given that the impacts of leadership practices manifest at multiple levels of engagement, I will locate practices and their impacts in the four leadership domains identified in the graphic to the right.[2]

In the domain of *leading yourself*, perhaps the most significant shift in the leadership ethos is the mandate to examine one's own identity and bring a consciousness of it into all leadership domains and contexts. Aspects of identity here include race, class, gender, tenure, and access to power both internal and external to the organization. Many of us have been acculturated to believe that we can lead and manage across race, power, and privilege without acknowledging the entitlement explicitly. For those of us who are white, middle or upper class, and/or educated within the established system, this has often meant an obliviousness to the effects of our privilege on our own analysis of situations, on our decision making, and on the quality of the relationships we can forge with diverse staff, boards, and constituents. At times, for marginalized groups, this pressure to not discuss identity in an organizational context fuels an internalized oppression that thwarts contributions to organizational impact and change. The belief now is that self-awareness and emotional intelligence—which are terms that have often been used in color- and class-blind ways—are dependent on our capacity to understand how identity influences our leadership.

So how can we support the open and ongoing reflection by all staff on the connections between their identities and their leadership practices? Leadership coaching can be extremely effective in this regard, although hiring coaches who bring identity consciousness to their work is obviously essential. If leadership is a practice, not a position, all staff should have access to coaching if at all possible. Peer coaching is an alternative if professional coaching is not financially feasible, or an excellent complement if it is. (And if you are providing professional coaching to senior staff and not others, consider the message that sends with respect to the leadership ethos.) Coaching methodologies are well suited to individuals' exploration of why they are making certain leadership choices and to resetting intentions to achieve different results where desired. Another powerful practice is to staff affinity groups by identity—for example, race or gender. In my personal experience at CompassPoint, for instance, being part of a white staff affinity group has given me an unprecedented and invaluable space to explore how whiteness informs my leadership and to identify and work to rectify the results of my unexamined whiteness that have manifested destructively in our organization.

> In the domain of *leading yourself*, perhaps the most significant shift in the leadership ethos is the mandate to examine one's own identity and bring a consciousness of it into all leadership domains and contexts.

The concept of shared leadership, which has numerous potential structural and practical expressions, anchors the progressive leadership ethos in the next domain: *leading (with) others*. For decades, we have discussed the executive director job as not doable, as inevitably leading to burnout, as reinforcing a "martyr syndrome," and so forth. But those assumptions still focus on the individual leader and what he or she needs. Today, when we think of leadership practice politically, shared leadership becomes about more than just sharing the work: it becomes about sharing the power. As leaders with positional power especially, how do we build the power of others through our approach to leadership? Sharing power may indeed make the job more doable, but that is not the only reason to share power. We are also trying to explore new, more equitable and constructive ways of holding power that will ripple out into all of the work we do.

The shift in practice here is a focus on building deep, transformative relationships across traditional lines of power. Sharing power is far more complex than "delegating" or "managing up," so it requires an investment in relationship that is atypical, in my experience, in mainstream organizations. If I am going to share power with you—that is, take a risk with you—I have to know you and trust you. There are no shortcuts to knowing and trusting—no efficiencies, at least in the near term. A practice introduced at CompassPoint by my colleague Asha Mehta to support this kind of relationship building is called *designing the alliance*.[3] This is a practice that can be used in relationships in all power directions, including between staff and board, and on teams. At its essence, the practice is about prioritizing the relationship by setting up understandings about what's important to each person, how people react when they are upset, what they will do to reset when their relationship is inevitably challenged, and so forth. I have seen firsthand at CompassPoint how this practice has supported the development of powerful team relationships that have yielded dramatically stronger programmatic results. Prioritizing relationship building can change how you approach all kinds of staff and board interactions: meeting agendas that focus on storytelling rather than report outs; increased frequency of social gatherings; even reimagined work spaces, so that people connect with one another often over the course of the day. In short, it is relational organizations, not transactional ones, that will advance the practice of sharing power elegantly.

In the *leading the organization* domain, the opportunity is for progressive nonprofit organizations to view themselves as laboratories for new, more equitable and effective management structures, policies, and practices. For so long, we have tended to replicate the structures, policies, and practices of the for-profit sector, on the premise that they were "best practice," more efficient, more protective of organizations from risk, and so on. It is noteworthy that we have done this even as we have seen (and even protested in our outward-facing work) the results of many of these practices in the for-profit sector for low-wage workers, people of color, women, and the environment. As we align our organizational leadership ethos with our broader ethos for social change, we can reimagine any number of traditional organizational practices, including how and who we hire, how we develop people, how we compensate people, how we engage with our constituents, how we communicate our impact, and so forth.

Human resources, for instance, is an organizational leadership arena ripe for new practices that align with a progressive ethos. One of the typically unchallenged assumptions of traditional human resources is confidentiality: confidential salaries, confidential performance reviews, confidential management-team decisions about whom to promote and whom to terminate. As my CompassPoint colleague Spring Opara said recently at an all-staff meeting, "Confidentiality is the enemy of equity." She said this as we were discussing the work of a new organizational structure we had instituted: an equity panel of nonexecutive staff who now review all salary decisions for equity across race, gender, tenure, et cetera. The experience of moving to this transparent, nonconfidential salary approach has profoundly transformed my own view of management and deepened trust

across CompassPoint with respect to the historically mistrust-inducing practice of setting staff compensation. The results of our reimagining of compensation through the lens of a progressive leadership ethos include: raising our compensation floor so that everyone makes a true living wage for the Bay Area; people of color who are emerging as important organizational leaders getting substantial raises and being better recognized for the contributions they are already making; eliminating the persistent discrepancies between administrative staff's pay and program staff's pay; and a collective belief that we can create our own structures and systems to reflect our own assumptions—not those of the dominant culture—about what work to value.

At the levels of our particular fields and the nonprofit sector overall—reflected in the *leading within the field, sector, and/or movement* domain—aligning our leadership ethos to our broader vision for change means confronting the nonprofit-industrial complex in our everyday decision making, just as we demand that other sectors and industries challenge their own self-preservationist habits and tactics. I believe that we have passed the moment when progressive leaders—both of nonprofits and philanthropies—can credibly ignore the nonprofit-industrial complex or pretend that their organizations are exempt from some degree of collusion with it. It is not a question of whether we each collude, but to what extent—and how much effort we should put toward using whatever influence we may have to highlight the consequences of that collusion and promote alternative approaches. This is important, because our legitimacy as agents of change is inevitably undermined when we don't openly acknowledge the incentives that drive our choices.

In practical terms, this means leaders being willing to risk capital—financial, social, and political—in requesting and/or modeling changes to how our sector operates, so that it responds better to those for whom we exist. It means more powerful organizations being ever conscious of what resources they are garnering, what communities they are entering (and with whose permission), and how they are or are not partnering with other organizations. It means the leadership of our infrastructure organizations—nonprofit associations and networks of all kinds—using their collective power and platforms to challenge rather than uphold the status quo, even when some nonprofits may stand to lose something. And it certainly means leaders in philanthropy—with their disproportionate financial capital and influence—taking the necessary risks to finance and promote the work that is most needed to accelerate social change.

The first step is a series of conversations among your staff and board about how your current leadership practices reflect your shared beliefs and assumptions about where the world is going or needs to go. If you believe that racial justice is core to the change that needs to happen in the world, for instance, how can you better reflect that in your leadership structures, policies, and practices? If you believe that creativity and artistic expression are essential to that change, how can you better reflect that in your leadership structures, policies, and practices? If you believe that a deep ecology and respect for the Earth are core to that change, how can you better reflect that in your leadership structures, policies, and practices? Leadership and management are not generic methods but rather powerful potential means for experimenting toward a desired future.

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NOTES
1. Dictionary.com, s.v. "ethos," accessed November 29, 2017, www.dictionary.com/browse/ethos.
2. Adapted by CompassPoint from the work of the Center for Creative Leadership, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Daniel Goleman, David Day, V. Jean Ramsey, and Jean Kantanbu Latting, and the Building Movement Project.
3. Academy of Leadership Coaching & NLP; "Designing the Alliance: How to create healthier personal and professional relationships," blog, accessed December 4, 2017, nlp-leadership-coaching.com/designing-the -alliance-how-to-create-healthier-personal-and -professional-relationships/.

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Leading for Mission Results:
Connecting Leadership Beliefs with Predictable Changes

by Tom Adams and Jeanne Bell

EVERY LEADER AND ORGANIZATION WANTS TO MAKE a difference. We call this *mission results*. BoardSource described that desire in the name of its annual survey: "Leading with Intent." As leaders, organizations, networks, and communities, we have choices, and this article is about broadening the lens of our choices so that we can make more of a difference and speed up change for good in our world—expanding each leader's capacity and will to lead with intent.

What follows will examine how what we (nonprofit leaders) believe about leading and change impacts how we traverse the unavoidable changes and transitions every organization faces. Our aim is to offer a path to connect the dots between what we broadly refer to as leadership and organizational transitions and leadership ethoses. It is our experience and conviction that mission results are better sustained and increased by intentionally paying attention to and managing well the predictable and unpredictable changes in leadership and organizations. And what we believe about who leads and how they lead influences our options and success in growing mission results over time. In this article, we will point out both what seems to work and what doesn't.

There are reasons why not every leader and organization makes a difference. Most would like to make more of a difference; some are frustrated about it and wonder what to do. We know a lot about why some organizations get much better results than others, and we know some things about how to support boards, executives, and staffs to increase results. But we have a few barriers to overcome in order to fully use what we know, and to learn more:

1. We are too often surprised and forced to act reactively to predictable organizational changes. Every executive and board leader

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will leave some day. Every person who adds value will, as well. What our mission is, and how we achieve it, is changing and will continue to change. Short-term success is very different from long-term sustainability and progress on mission. We deal with these and other facts of organizational life one at a time and typically only when forced to by circumstances, funders, or regulations. We are reluctant to accept that change is ubiquitous, permanent, and unavoidable, and that developing competencies in leadership and organizational changes and transitions is critical to sustaining high-performing organizations and excellent mission results.

2. Leading a nonprofit organization requires passion, commitment, skills, and discipline. We are too often less than clear about the skills and discipline needed to make the most of the passion and commitment, and expect leaders to acquire these skills and discipline innately or miraculously.

3. Organizations operate in a community and world with a culture and set of beliefs about leadership and who leads. There are many different views and beliefs about leadership, and these beliefs influence how well we lead, as well as our results.

Our (the authors') experience with hundreds of organizations and research-based data make a compelling case for:

- Leaders becoming more proactive in ongoing attention to leadership and organizational transitions as a way to expand and ensure long-term mission results;
- Leaders making attention to leadership beliefs and practices (our leadership ethoses) an essential part of all transition planning, because these beliefs influence and limit or expand possible mission results; and
- Leaders—board, staff, funders, advisors, and consultants—learning continuously about the practices, disciplines, and competencies required to make the most of leadership and organizational transitions and build a culture of leader development and intentional attention to leadership beliefs and practices.

The Case for Action

In fact, there are two cases for action: what is not working and what *is* working. First, a look at what is not working:

- We have over twenty years of data on the predictability of executive transition and the sector's limited attention to seeing transition as more than a search for the next leader. When key leaders leave, there is much more going on than just filling a position. Twenty to 30 percent of organizations take advantage of leadership transitions to advance mission results. Seventy to 80 percent largely miss or underuse the opportunity.
- Twenty years of talk about the racial diversity of nonprofit board and staff leadership has not increased diversity. In fact, recent data indicate that despite the stated desire by boards to expand their racial diversity, their composition has stayed the same—and the data offer little evidence that anything will change any time soon.[1] Another recent study suggests that we are addressing this goal with a set of faulty assumptions.[2]
- Recent studies point to the need to make organizational sustainability a critical issue in annual and strategic planning and in looking at how to best increase mission results.[3]

In terms of what is working, there is a lot of progress that offers both hope and a guide to what competencies and disciplines have the most potential for increasing organizational results and board and staff satisfaction. What's working is:

- Despite the complexity and generally accepted unique challenges of founder executive transitions, the combined attention to transition, sustainability, succession, and search greatly increases the odds of successful transition and sustained mission success.[4]
- Organizations that use trained external interim executives are able to use transition to advance organizational capacity and results.
- Organizations that engage in partnerships, collaboratives, and other types of association with others increase impact and appear to be more sustainable.[5]

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- Organizations that go deeper in their exploration of diversity (beyond recruiting someone to that end for the board or an executive position) are able to define and build an inclusive, diverse organization and sustain and build results over time.
- Organizations that are open to shared leadership and pay attention to who leads and how each leader is supported and encouraged have an opportunity to advance internal leader development and potential succession.

If as a sector we want to speed up mission results and manage predictable and unpredictable changes better, leading with intent means: accepting that leadership and organizational changes are constant; learning how to lead and manage this change for good; and paying attention to how our beliefs about leadership may need to transform as we change direction, organizational culture and habits, and leaders.

Leadership and Organizational Transitions

For most leaders, our first reaction to possible change is to deny or avoid it. Sure, some people love change (and the churn and adrenaline that come with it), but in any board or staff or community there is typically a powerful constituency for not changing, or not changing "now." Hence, we experience some of the challenges noted above, where we say we want something different and nothing changes.

For example, when a board hears month after month that there is a budget deficit, the focus is on the symptoms—raise more money and cut expenses. The board may accept the need to change because there is not enough operating money. In reality, the problem usually goes deeper than that. Behind the money challenge is a range of possible causes: lack of clear mission and strategy, so no compelling case to engage donors; lack of consistent results due to staffing or leadership issues; failure to see the need to change programs to better serve a new constituency. Thus, accepting that change is needed is the first step and requires a second step of making the connection between the symptom and the real problem.

In several books on change and transition, William Bridges offers some basic guidelines to leading with intent through predictable organizational challenges. Bridges's core belief is that leaders need to appreciate the difference between change and transition. Change is an event that happens externally at a specific moment; transition is an internal psychological process that happens over time. The transition process, Bridges suggests, requires an ending or a letting go of old beliefs or behaviors and a time of uncertainty while we head into something new, which he calls the *neutral zone*. To complete a transition and arrive at a new beginning (new executive fully operating, new strategic plan implemented, and so forth) requires journeying through all the uncertainties of the neutral zone while completing the ending and the transition to new beginnings.[6] Failure to pay attention to the transition process often undermines or derails the change effort.

When a board is faced with an executive who is leaving, there is a choice. If the challenge is perceived as finding the next executive as quickly as possible, there is little attention paid to either the ending with the outgoing executive (what needs to change, what opportunities are involved in bringing a new executive into the organization) or defining what is beginning (other than that there is a new person in the executive's office). While this approach may seem simpler and commonsensical, it misses much of the opportunity to advance mission results when transitioning an executive.

Every change of executive happens in a broader context. Understanding this context is essential to managing the ending well, understanding your unique neutral zone (and how long it might last), and defining and heading into the new beginning with the right new leader. And this important—not necessarily long—organizational pause also provides an opportunity to review what the right leader (or leaders) means, given your changing aspirations and challenges. Executive transition is an obvious time to revisit your leadership ethos and how it impacts both the process and decisions of hiring the next executive. Pause for a moment and think about the nonprofit organizations you

know. How many have experienced the following in the last few years?

- The unexpected resignation/departure of a key board or staff leader. Sometimes it happens because of a job change, new family responsibilities with children or aging parents, or (perhaps more often than we would like to admit) through sudden death.
- The expected departure of a founder or long-tenured executive, or one who turned around and transformed the organization.
- An organization whose community has changed and whose leadership has become disconnected from the community, while service demand and customer satisfaction are decreasing because of the culture and/or language disconnect.
- A board with values of diversity and inclusion that has been unsuccessful in adding board members of color who stay involved for more than a year or two.
- Suggestion by a funder or group of board members that the organization is stuck and needs to move to the next level—but not knowing what that could actually involve.
- An organization thought to be solid as a rock collapsing with the departure of some key leaders or funding.
- An organization struggling to diversify revenue and being unsuccessful in that attempt.

These are examples of how leadership and organizational transitions are happening all around us.

Leadership Beliefs and Practices—
Our Leadership Ethos

The capacity of an organization to sense a needed shift in its approach to leadership is as important as ongoing readiness for the inevitable transition of leaders. The structures and processes of leadership also typically need to evolve as the organization's mission and work evolve. We can think of this as the evolving leadership ethos of the organization.

For instance, a top-down form of leadership may have been appropriate when the founder was establishing the organization and leading it

through its initial phase of maturation, but it's likely that style of leadership will not resonate for a diverse and more broadly expert staff as the organization grows. In this case, the beliefs about what leadership should look and feel like will have changed, and the staff will likely demand more shared authority and strategic influence. For groups with explicit social change missions, their leadership ethos may include very conscious choices to experiment with shared leadership and distributed decision making, because they view their internal work as part and parcel of what they are working to achieve outside the organization. For groups that intentionally center the voices and perspectives of a particular group or population—youth-led organizations, for instance, or any group that prioritizes those most impacted by the issue they are addressing—this will necessarily impact the culture, structures, and practices of leadership in specific ways.

So, there is a leadership ethos in every organization—a set of beliefs, customs, or practices that are prevalent in how leadership is expressed—though for many organizations this ethos goes unarticulated. We believe that to fully leverage moments of organizational and leadership transition, staff and board should reflect on any shifting assumptions about leadership that may have emerged. Is there something shifting in the organization's understanding of what's needed from leadership? Before we hire our next executive director, for instance, do we want to consider whether we have done a good enough job at developing diverse talent inside the organization during the current executive's tenure? Why or why not? Do we want to explore whether the board of directors wants to be in a very different kind of partnership with the staff going forward? Do we want to explore whether hiring another single executive for a job that we know is well beyond forty hours a week aligns with our values?

These are just examples of the kinds of questions that would come up at times of transition if we thought not just about who leads next but also about how we want him or her to lead going forward.

The capacity of an organization to sense a needed shift in its approach to leadership is as important as ongoing readiness for the inevitable transition of leaders.

How to Get Started

This is the moment when you make a commitment or not. It is your opportunity to lead with intent. It is a decision, and a half-hearted decision will not change much. Given all the demands on your time, a half-hearted decision to "think about it" is by default a decision for the status quo and for not increasing mission results.

It is hard to make progress on building skills and disciplines without a multiyear commitment. You might not sell the rest of the board or the staff right away on making that multiyear effort, but you can start with one pressing challenge or opportunity. However, as a board leader or executive, if you begin to see this as one step toward making attention to leadership, organizational transitions, and ethos part of the organizational culture, you will significantly speed up the results and benefits. We are all disposed to the flavor or opportunity or crisis of the month. They are tempting and often all consuming. The decision to see these changing obsessions as choices in this larger context of leadership and organizational transitions makes it easier to pay attention to them or ignore them—as your plan to increase mission results dictates.

Is there a guarantee that mission results will increase if your organization gets more skilled and proactive at seeing and managing leadership and organizational change moments through the lens of a strong leadership ethos? What do you think? Think about the connections among your mission, strategy, revenue, and leadership. If you were more intentional about these connections, wouldn't it make sense for your results to increase? Think about the beliefs and values—both stated and unstated—that guide the behaviors of your board and staff. This shapes your culture, and underneath the culture are beliefs about leadership. Is it possible these beliefs are limiting your results? Might attention to them lead to better connecting what you want to achieve with how and with whom you will achieve it?

Here are some examples of situations you might face that could bring an opportunity to make a long-term commitment and get started on a path toward more intentional leadership:

- If you are about to begin a new strategic or operational plan, call a time-out and ask how

What's Different? Leading for Mission Results

The following are examples of conscious or unconscious decisions and approaches to leading and managing a nonprofit. The first list sees leadership as managing a number of largely unconnected and episodic events in the annual and ongoing life of the organization. The second list and accompanying graphic offers a way to connect decisions into a proactive and holistic approach to leading and managing that increases mission results.

●

EPISODIC OR REACTIVE APPROACH

- Dealing with leadership change (executive director, board chair, board finance chair/treasurer, key managers) when it happens.

- Looking at leadership change as an isolated event—finding the next leader without attention to how the context of the organization informs requirements of leaders.

- Dealing with finances through budget and audit reviews with little connection to leadership and strategy.

- Assuming that the current beliefs and behaviors about leadership and culture will continue to work.

- Showing commitment to diversity through recruitment of one or two people of color.

- Dealing with unexpected departures of managers or board leaders *when* they happen.

- Assuming that there is one right approach to leading and managing regardless of organizational size, the community culture, or where the organization is in its development and organizational life cycle.

- Minimizing the importance of process and engagement through disregard of the difference between a desired change (an event) and transition (the process to get to the change).

- Relying on the leaders present and having difficulty asking for help or considering a different approach.

CONNECTED OR PROACTIVE APPROACH

- Planning for leadership change in advance, because it is predictable with review of leadership beliefs and succession planning.

- Using each leadership decision to review what is changing in how you get mission results and how the skills and relationships of new leaders might add to your capacity to improve mission results.

- Considering finances and other key systems as strategic tools to be fine-tuned to support desired mission results.

- Including discussion of leadership beliefs and culture in all planning.

- Exploring and developing a shared understanding of the values that guide the organization and how diversity and inclusiveness add value to mission results. Getting the necessary help to ensure all points of view are heard and that all are part of carrying out the values in leader recruitment, support, and mission implementation.

- Committing to defining the competencies and skills needed for leadership for mission results, assessing backup for key positions in light of the required roles and responsibilities, and developing an action plan to increase backup and decrease disruption of unplanned absences of leaders.

- Including in annual and strategic planning a broader look at how strategy and business model, leadership resources (people, money, and systems), and culture change as the organization develops, and at the implications for leadership beliefs, strategy, and culture.

- Paying attention to both the transition process and the recruitment when hiring or selecting leaders. When leading a change effort, ask what leaders are losing in the change, and make time to support the change process.

Exploring New and Evolving Connections around Transition

Challenging our organizations on who leads and with what leadership beliefs and practices

The Evolving Leadership Ethos

Organizational Transitions

Leadership Transitions

Proactively refining organizational strategy and business model to respond to stakeholder needs and the operating context; adapting organizational culture and systems in concert

Preparing for 10% executive turnover across the sector annually; recruiting and developing leaders through ongoing succession planning

Speak up when you feel stuck or disconnected, and ask for help to regularly revisit how to best advance this mission. Consider how partnerships, collaborations, and/or other ways of working together might speed up mission results.

your beliefs about who leads is impacting the plan. Consider how you might improve your long-range impact and the development of your board and staff leaders with this plan.

- If you are about to nominate new leaders for the board, consider the competencies and connections needed to increase mission results, and consider recruiting for those skills and relationships. Ask leaders of an organization that is more diverse and inclusive than yours how they achieved that result, or seek help from an HR person or consultant who is skilled in deeper exploration of these issues before recruiting new members.
- If your executive has recently announced (or soon will announce) his or her departure, consider how to pay attention to the context and key issues that will influence the transition as well as the search, and get the help needed to do this. Also, look at your internal leaders and see if there are opportunities to explore shared leadership, an internal successor, or other creative approaches that serve your culture, values, and talent.
- If you have an executive who is the founder, served for ten or more years, or led a major turnaround, who may be considering departing or retiring in the next three to five years, consider focusing on how to make the most of these last years through an intentional succession and sustainability review and planning process. Consider investing in outside assistance in order to ensure a fresh look at what is possible.
- If you have had a deficit for the last three years or are facing a big shift in funding, consider calling a time-out to look at the connections among strategy, leadership, culture, and how you secure revenue, in order to develop a set of priority actions that sustain mission results within available resources.
- If your organization is large enough to have a management team, engage the team in discussion of leadership beliefs and practices, and expand your attention to leader development. If yours is a smaller organization, explore how you can best combine the talent of staff, board, and volunteers for mission results, and what

shifts in leadership beliefs and behaviors will advance your team and the results.[7]

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Humming organizations get and stay that way through passion, commitment, smart work, discipline, and luck or grace. We cannot influence the luck or grace. We *can* continue to learn more about leadership and organizational transitions and our beliefs about leadership, and use this learning to guide the day-to-day and year-to-year work of the organization. The result is greater odds of becoming or remaining a high-performing organization, and more joy and satisfaction in the time spent in the organization. It is one compelling way to speed up the change-for-good curve.

NOTES

1. *Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices* (Washington, DC: BoardSource, 2017), 9, 12–14.

2. Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther, *Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap* (New York: Building Movement Project, 2017).

3. Hez G. Norton and Deborah S. Linnell, *Essential Shifts for a Thriving Nonprofit Sector* (Boston: Third Sector New England, 2014), 9.

4. Unpublished retrospective study of thirty transitions completed by The Foraker Group, TransitionGuides (now Raffa PC), and CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, conducted by the transition consultants involved.

5. "Sustainability Model: What does sustainability really mean to a nonprofit?" The Foraker Group, accessed November 29, 2017, www.forakergroup.org/index.php /our-business/sustainability-model/.

6. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2009), 3–6.

7. For a summary of resources by topic, go to www .compasspoint.org, raffadomore.com/category /search-succession/, or search the *Nonprofit Quarterly*'s archive of webinars and articles at www.npq.org.

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Autopsy of a Failed Holacracy:
Lessons in Justice, Equity, and Self-Management

by Simon Mont

MANY ORGANIZATIONS ARE CRAVING A NEW way of doing things. They feel the pressures of bureaucracy, understand the problems with hierarchy, and are ready to shift into new organizational models. This is especially true for organizations that exist for the express purpose of achieving social justice. Folks working in these types of organizations are familiar with the causes and reproductions of oppression, and they want to uproot them in their workplaces.

In the search for a new organizational model, some social justice organizations are turning to holacracy, a self-management practice intended to empower meaningful decisions in pursuit of purpose;[1] many are finding themselves completely unsatisfied with the experience.[2] People I have spoken to in a wide range of positions in for-profit and nonprofit organizations have reported that holacracy is mechanistic and dehumanizing, and that the model does not in fact have the potential to create the kind of workplace and world they want to see. Organizations that care deeply about social justice repeat many of the complaints of profit-focused businesses reported in the article by Ethan Bernstein et al., "Beyond the Holacracy Hype"—for example, that time spent on self-management leaves less time for programmatic work; that it is challenging to learn how to operate within the system; and that too many roles and responsibilities make coordination and prioritizing tricky.[3] But as the article points out, with justice-focused organizations there seems to be another layer, a tension that runs deeper than management, operations, and efficiency: a sense that these models aren't addressing the deeper systemic issues having to do with oppressive power dynamics that are impacting people's lives. This tension indicates that holacracy—and many of the models being promoted as "teal," "dynamic governance," or "sociocratic"—might be just as problematic as the hierarchies they are meant to

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replace.[4] This dynamic is complicated by the fact that these governance systems claim to create environments where people are equally empowered peers collaborating without hierarchy; this creates a situation whereby holacracy (and the like) could turn out to be elaborate, albeit unintentional, gaslighting.

To gaslight is to destabilize someone by denying the person's perception of reality and delegitimizing the person's beliefs. This is done in order to cause the person to behave in a particular way or accept a certain state of affairs. In the context of organizations, the implementation of a new structure can create a powerful narrative of equity or transformation while leaving the underlying undemocratic dynamics unaltered. Having spoken with people from more than thirty organizations promoting holacracy and/or sociocracy, dynamic governance, or teal organizations ranging across sectors and issue areas over the past two years, I didn't find any that appear to be gaslighting intentionally: all seem to be working in earnest toward being a force for good and transformation. But elements of the ideology and language that surround these management models cast a shadow. If we don't confront this shadow, we will have a generation of organizations that think they are creating a new world while repackaging old mistakes and failing to achieve the kind of deep shifts required for justice, sustainability, and meaning.

A Story

In 2016, I spoke with an organization in which the failure to confront this shadow explicitly resulted in the rejection of holacracy, a reversion to hierarchy, and a well of interpersonal tension. The story goes something like this: Senior management wanted to create a more just, empowering, and effective workplace. Part of this desire arose from their awareness that management was a group of mostly white, mostly formally educated professionals around the age of fifty leading an organization whose mission was to break down many forms of oppression. They did not know exactly how to go about changing the structure of their organization to reflect their values, so

they researched and spent a significant amount of time learning about holacracy. Holacracy's stated vision of a redistributed authority, respect for humanity, and liberated creative energy was exactly what they were looking for. They were grateful that holacracy provided a comprehensive framework and a constitution, and they suggested that their organization adopt it.

Holacracy replaces hierarchy, departments, and job descriptions with semiautonomous circles and roles. A *circle* is a small team that is responsible for a certain set of issues or tasks (called a *domain*). Circles have the authority to make decisions within their domain without seeking approval from a supervisor. This creates an environment in which, for example, the circle working on designing and delivering an educational program to a community does not need to report to an executive director or director of educational outreach or other such department. Circle members report to each other as peers. A circle only needs to check in with other circles when its activity affects or implicates the other circles. For example, an education circle would need to check in with the budget circle if it wanted to spend money on a new project.

Each circle in turn comprises *roles*. Roles are sets of functions and purposes that one or more people fill. This allows the group to break up the work of the circle into discrete bits. The relationship between role and circle is similar to the relationship between circle and organization: people in roles are empowered to do their work as they see best, and only check in with the circle when coordination is needed. Decision making and coordination happen through highly structured meetings. The idea is that by loosely coordinating autonomous action, people are freed to use their best judgment to respond quickly to needs, instead of responding to the top-down exercise of power from people removed from the reality on the ground.[5]

At first, the people in the organization in question were open to adopting the model. There was general agreement on the goals holacracy was supposed to enable, and they decided to give it a try. But right away, conflicts arose. Some

people felt that their personalities and cultures were being repressed as they attempted to interact in the ways prescribed by the model; some felt excluded; some felt incredibly empowered; and some saw that the pattern of people who felt empowered reproduced the very dynamics of privilege and oppression they were trying to subvert. The organization split into two groups: holacracy champions and holacracy skeptics. Both groups agreed that the early-stage embodiment of holacracy had proven to be unsatisfactory and was not leading them toward their goals. The champions believed this was because the group was failing to work within the system; the skeptics believed the system was the problem.

This is where unintentional gaslighting entered the scene. The skeptics felt intuitively that there was a deep problem with holacracy's effect on the organization, but they couldn't quite pinpoint what that was. Despite having put into place holacracy's circles and roles, familiar old power dynamics were reemerging. Some people felt like they were contorting themselves to fit within the system, while others seemed to experience the system as giving them wings with which to fly.

As nefarious power dynamics continued to creep in, it became more difficult for those marginalized by the system to articulate that a force related to issues like gender, race, and class was interfering with equity. The skeptics couldn't quite put their finger on precisely what was happening because of how subtle the dynamics were and how tricky it is generally to talk about exclusion and power. When the skeptics did open up the conversation, the champions would respond that the problem must be with the organization and maybe even with the skeptics themselves. They repeated holacracy's promises of empowerment, and reminded everyone that a period of discomfort was to be expected in any transition. The skeptics' negative experience contradicted the holacracy ideology, which proclaims that the system creates equity and empowerment by its very design—and those empowered by the system found it all too easy to blame the marginalized for their own exclusion.

Critics of holacracy tend to lack the vocabulary to voice their discomfort because holacracy—and the whole realm of management more generally—is considered to be an area of professional expertise. This in itself sets up a problematic dynamic: it situates the system above the users, and when we pay attention to the social identities of the people who tend to fall into the skeptics camp and those who tend to fall into the champions camp, the dynamic repeats. The champions in this story comprised senior-level management, who had spent time familiarizing themselves with holacracy before implementing it, and people who felt immediately empowered by the model, intuitively understanding that there was power up for grabs, and pursuing it actively. Who tends to be in senior management positions? White folks with advanced degrees. Who tends to be comfortable with pursuing power? People who have had positive experiences stepping into power—largely men and white folks. Unsurprisingly, the skeptics were mostly people of color who had seen all sorts of promises for equity fall short over their lives. In this particular case, white women tended to be champions, possibly because they occupied many of the senior management positions.

So, the well-intentioned attempt to increase equity, empowerment, and efficiency through the adoption of holacracy ended up with people in privileged positions implying that the reason the strategy wasn't working was that people in less-privileged positions just weren't behaving properly. Any criticism of the system could be reframed as criticism of the critic.[6] And in the case of the organization struggling with the negative effects of holacracy, what made the situation extra complicated is that some of the difficulties really *were* about the system and some of the difficulties really *were* about people's behavior—but the group as a whole lacked the ability to name, discuss, and work with these sticky tensions.

A Pattern

I've spoken to a number of organizations that share this basic story. It's not always senior management that becomes fixated on a specific

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model or solution, but there *is* usually a small group of champions for one particular system who are convinced that it holds the key—as long as the group learns how to work within it. When a system like holacracy does not reward its adopters, some abandon it and return to hierarchy, and some hope that sociocracy or some other system will fulfill the promise; others, however, toil away in discomfort, deciding that despite the imperfections, at least holacracy is not as bad as being subject to top-down power structures.

What it comes down to is this: folks crave a just, liberated, equitable, compassionate workplace, and there is a whole array of seen and unseen forces that make this difficult to manifest. The reasons go far beyond organizational structure. Our workplaces are made up of much more than just their organizational structures and governance processes: they are complex ecosystems of people, relationships, cultures, mind-sets, and systems that exist within the social/political/ economic/spiritual context of the broader world. To achieve the kind of workplace that holacracy and like systems promise to enable, we must be mindful of the implicit biases, explicit prejudices, intergenerational/historical traumas, microaggressions, and multiple other forces at play in most workplaces.

Shifting into a new formal structure is in many ways the easy part, because it's the most visible— the easiest to put our hands on and tinker with. The real work comes when we have to relearn how to relate on personal and interpersonal levels and look at the project of self-governance in the context of our full human lives. A new organizational structure can create new possibilities for the ways we relate to each other, but internalized ways of thinking and being can cause us to fall back into old patterns without even realizing it. This gives rise to an invisible structure of exclusion and inequity despite any visible structure of empowerment that may have been put in place.

Models like holacracy focus their attention on some of the most visible elements of our organizations: decision-making processes, organizational charts, task delegation, and so forth. When teams adopt the models without being aware of

how these visible systems relate to more subtle but equally powerful forces within organizations—colonial cultural norms, implicit biases, internalized oppression, microaggressions, interpersonal power—they run into trouble. It is especially important to discuss this problem openly, because some of the solutions suggested by new models carry with them aspects of the very problem social justice advocates are trying to solve: pretending we live in a "post-racial" society, and thus creating space for racism to go unaddressed; creating environments where people of certain identities dominate organization direction and decision making; deeming certain cultural forms of self-expression unwelcome in the workplace.

There are many different people creating and talking about new ways to organize groups— and different communities use different words to refer to their projects (holacracy, sociocracy, teal, dynamic governance, flat structures, and so forth). This broad and diverse movement of thinkers, practitioners, and the frameworks they inhabit and models they use represents a wide spectrum of sensitivities to the dynamics of identity, power, history, and colonial norms. Holacracy, with its mechanistic and colorblind system, sits at the less conscious end of the spectrum. Its founder, Brian Robertson, seems convinced that his system suits every environment, and he makes it very clear that if people experience problems with the model, the cause lies within themselves and they should change their own internal mind-set.[7] This creates a rigid system that relies on conformity. Systems like sociocracy, on the other hand, are often presented more humbly as part of a constellation of practices (including nonviolent communication and anti-oppression trainings) that support the emergence of new systems over time. Regardless of the brand or buzzwords associated with a new governance system, it is essential to be sensitive to the limits of what a new structure can actually provide, the way that different people experience and perceive the system, and whether the system is serving the people or the people are serving the system.

Examining the Foundations of Holacracy

To understand why holacracy (or any formal design of an organization, for that matter) isn't enough, we need to witness some of the mind-sets and assumptions that underlie it.[8] The mind-sets we will examine here are not unique to holacracy; they appear often in conversations about new forms of organization and management. We are focusing on holacracy as one specific instance of a pattern that is present in the conversation about new organizational models.

Three of holacracy's central assumptions are worth naming in order to enable us to see its limits and begin imagining new possibilities: (1) maximizing autonomy and coordinating the behavior of individuals is central to good governance; (2) explicit, linear, reproducible meeting processes and language are always preferable; and (3) the role/circle system holds space for everyone to have and use power.[9] This paradigm produces some great tools, but it comes with some problems. We will walk through each mind-set and its limitations.

The first two assumptions are not surprising when we consider that the system's creator is a white man with a background in computer programming and software development. His thinking exists very much within a scientific enlightenment framework that emphasizes autonomous individuals and focuses on easily visible aspects of reality. Robertson follows the historical arc of this thinking by using leading-edge science as the guiding metaphor for human organizations. In his 2015 publication *Holacracy: The New Management System for a Rapidly Changing World*, Robertson refers to holacracy as a self-governing "operating system," and his predecessors as having designed management systems to "keep the gears moving."[10] It is the updated version of a worldview that sees humans as component parts within a mechanistic, rule-based reality.

The third assumption flows from a simplistic conception of power. If the only source of power (the ability to influence others) arose from the formal delegation of power to individuals within the system, then roles and circles might be sufficient to achieve an ideal balance. Social human power, however, is incredibly complex. Creating a structure of roles and circles does not somehow create balance between people whose relationships carry the weight of personal and cultural histories. This conception of power is in line with the philosophies that underlie the dominant bureaucratic state and institutional structure, but it fails to accommodate the wisdom of generations of activism, storytelling, social theory, and psychology.

All this is not a condemnation of holacracy or Robertson. It is an observation that he is a particular person with a particular intellectual and experiential background that influences the design that he created. His work is certainly valuable; like all work, it has its limits. The tricky part is that his assumptions are so resonant with mainstream American ideology that we might not even recognize them as assumptions. By being explicit about some of the foundations of his thinking, we can begin to see how we might make different decisions. These assumptions are not unique to holacracy; they permeate many conversations and theories about self-management. We are focusing on holacracy as a case study because of how clear the assumptions are and how deeply their impacts are felt by many practitioners.

Breaking Down the Assumptions

Assumption #1: Maximizing autonomy and coordinating the behavior of individuals is central to good governance. This mind-set allows us to focus on our individual experience, to honor the leadership and creativity of all of us, and to increase efficiency by reducing needless communication. The shadow side of this paradigm is that it can lead to too much individualism.

Most people living in America have over time had individualism ingrained deeply into their minds and behaviors. We are taught that if each of us looks out for our own interests, the invisible hand of the marketplace will produce an equilibrium that meets everyone's needs. This increases the resonance of holacracy's philosophy of governance: Of course we should maximize people's

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freedom to do what they think is best! Of course it would be ideal if I had to check in with people as little as possible.

The trouble is that people with different identities, backgrounds, and personalities have varied experiences with this type of individualism. Some have been taught that if they move quickly and assertively, they will get what they want, while others have been taught that they will be ostracized. Some people feel that they could contribute if they were just allowed to; others feel that they need support and collaboration.

All of this and more adds up to situations in which people feel and behave in roles differently. A person who has positive experiences exercising individual autonomy in our culture may immediately view and experience autonomous roles as empowering; they may feel "freed" because they don't need to check in with other people. Folks who have been punished by society when attempting to assert autonomy will be aware that simply saying that everyone is empowered to act doesn't remove the threat of many types of oppression, both visible and invisible, that could be leveraged against them. Without responding to the very real presence of trauma and power differentials, the sudden statement that "every individual is equal" can sow the seeds of conflict and reproduce the unstated power differentials that are in place in broader society.

On top of this, many people who want to build a liberated and cooperative space are on high alert to the risks of individualism and see it as a threat to realizing that vision. They may even come from cultures where they were taught to deeply value close communication, feedback, and collective decision making. Acting from an individualistic role will be antithetical to such people's intuitive way of working—and sometimes even their ideas about what is good, healthy, moral, and sustainable. Holacracy is not complete individualism; there are teams, integrative decision making, and so forth. But it does have a bias toward empowering individual action. To get a sense of the implications of such a bias, imagine instead a bias *against* individual action. A system with a bias against individual action

would seek to limit the autonomous operational space of roles held by individuals and instead would use consensus-based decision making as often as possible. This would produce a high degree of transparency, demand the establishment and maintenance of many interpersonal relationships, and create a sense of community identity. Of course, it would also take longer to make decisions.

There is not an overall right or wrong balance, per se—but there *is* a right balance for each particular group. Holacracy seeks to empower individuals for the sake of individual autonomy and operational efficiency, but those aren't the only values in the universe. A wise organization will balance these with values like establishing equitable power relations and fostering a sense of community.

Assumption #2: Explicit, linear, reproducible meeting processes and language are always preferable. The meeting processes of holacracy are clearly defined and regimented. They provide a structure that, in theory, focuses the group on the most relevant information and surfaces it in a manner to reach efficient decisions and action plans. It cuts through the noise of many meeting environments and tells people exactly how to show up. This is the way of the businessman and the computer programmer. It's great—sometimes. Holacracy may be a great management operating system, but not everyone is excited about being a series of 1s and 0s. We can harness holacracy's benefits and supplement its shortcomings when we remember that we don't need to be completely attached to the holacracy processes *or* its belief that everything should be linear, identical, and reproducible throughout the whole organization.

This regimented way of interacting is also in direct contradiction to norms of many indigenous communities, faith-based communities, communities of color, queer communities, and communities of various national origins. For many of us, less structured space is necessary to feel welcome, safe, present, and whole. And significant wisdom is found when we practice patience, move more slowly, and unravel ideas in a nonlinear fashion. In fact, the imposition

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of urgency, linearity, and a structure that dictates how and when people can show up is a core component of the very hierarchical structures holacracy is supposed to replace and the colonial and patriarchal frameworks that many social justice organizers seek to reimagine. The refusal to practice patience, listen deeply, meet people on their own terms, honor stories, and understand complex interconnectivity lies close to the heart of many of the ills our society is perpetuating. Unfortunately, these mistakes are seen as successes when they enable quick decisions, straightforward thinking, and "rational" deliberation directed toward measurable goals and profits.

Many people have a preference for working in an explicit system that they can understand. When we organize ourselves to accommodate this preference, however, we narrow our awareness to only the things that we can make seem explicit and understandable. This results in reductive frameworks that do not accommodate the true complexity involved in our decisions and actions and that exclude information that might be valuable—simply because something does not fit into our predetermined rubrics. For example, if we decide that only quantifiable metrics are "reasonable," then we exclude stories, feelings, and meaning from our decisions. This type of controlling of what is "true" or admissible to conversation is exclusion in the name of clear, linear rationality, and is central to the perpetuation of oppression. It leaves us making poorer decisions because we ignore important perspectives. This need to exist in a structure we can understand causes many to impose a reductive and exclusionary framework instead of being humbled by the fact that it is literally impossible to understand the complexity and interconnectedness that surrounds us.

That said, such circumstances can create a phenomenally generative creative tension—so long as we stay mindful. We can use highly structured processes in some spaces and completely organic and fluid processes in others. We can experiment with different levels and types of structures to be able to relate in ways that meet

the needs of the moment. Different groups can find the processes that work for them in relation to their tasks. With a variety of processes occurring throughout the organization, individuals will sometimes feel completely at home and other times will feel on edge. Such mixtures of safety and tension can create learning and trust. Different consulting groups and frameworks suggest this idea to varying degrees. High degrees of structure *can* be useful. Some (myself included) take for granted that when we step into a formal design structure we will find space to relax, be present, and coordinate behavior smoothly. But a regimented cultural construct doesn't immediately feel good for everyone—and feelings vis-à-vis cultural constructs matter, because they signal to people where they have space to belong, show up, have a voice, be liberated.

In fact, meeting structures like that of holacracy render some types of communication and exploration impossible. For example, holacracy allows little space for people to refine an idea through direct debate, explore interconnected terrain through free association, or have a natural conversation as one would do casually among friends.

A similar cultural disconnect is at play within the holacracy vocabulary. Words like *lead link*, *integrative decision making*, *triage*, and *tactical meeting* all carry certain cultural connotations that resonate differently with different people. These are words evidently written by someone who cut his or her teeth in the software startup universe. Reimagining the vocabulary your organization uses—designing a way of speaking that references different people's identities and reflects their values—is a great way to intentionally create culture.

Assumption #3: The role/circle system holds space for everyone to have and use power. Holacracy does create space for everyone to have and use power, but only a certain kind of power. If we understand power as the ability to do something in a particular way, or influence others to do something in a particular way, then it's easy to see that there are many different types of power. There is the power we use when we vote (formal

power), the power we use when we give a dog a treat (reward power), the power we use to solve an algebra equation (expert power), the power we use when we put a child in time-out (coercive power), the power we use to give insider information to some people but not others (informational power), and the power that we use, consciously or unconsciously, by being in gendered/racialized/able bodies in the United States (referent power).

These six types of power, defined by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven, aren't necessarily complete, and they aren't the only way to understand interpersonal power.[11] But they help us to see a key point: the holacracy system specifically focuses on distributing formal power and expects the distribution of formal power to create more equitable workplaces. It leaves the other sources of power unmentioned, and that is a big oversight, especially when we are trying to be intentional about creating a world where everyone is safe enough to live a vibrant, expressive, and meaningful life.

Giving ourselves specifically delineated roles does not change the fact that we have been conditioned by such factors as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. It does not change the fact that there are cultural assumptions ingrained into our conscious and subconscious mental processes that cause us, for example, to treat male-bodied and female-bodied people differently for doing the same activity. And it doesn't change the fact that the power of such societal structures as, for instance, patriarchy, racism, or classism has caused us to develop patterns of behavior that limit ourselves and others.

To understand this, we can imagine a set of twins (female, for the sake of grammatical simplicity). As they grow up, one is consistently told that she deserves to pursue her dreams, take what she wants, and be who she wants to be. The other is consistently told that she is not entitled to autonomy and was created to serve, and she is punished when she expresses herself. These life experiences will shape the twins' personal, emotional, and cognitive development. If the two are later put in a room together and told,

"You are equals—act autonomously and make collaborative decisions," the mere fact that the words were uttered would not somehow make them true. Each twin would be facing completely different internal psychological dynamics impacting her thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and the way she identifies and uses her own power.

This is an oversimplification, of course, but it serves to illustrate just one of the many power dynamics at play within an organization. The point is that different pasts can influence the present, and in ignoring that influence we fail to recognize aspects of reality that must be accounted for in a system designed with the intention of empowering all who use it.

People will experience power within holacracy differently. These differences will be mediated by an uncountable number of factors, ranging from various axes of identity to personal history to personality to idiosyncratic trauma. This creates a situation where some will feel liberated by holacracy, others will understand how it can be liberating in theory but will not themselves feel liberated, and still others just won't buy into the system at all. People who are most often oppressed by unstated/invisible forms of power are less likely to feel liberated or to see the potential for liberation until the whole group speaks frankly about the various forms of power. If this is not done, some in the group will assume that everything is fine, while others will be silenced.

There is no way around the fact that equally distributing power is much more complicated than designing a particular governance system. It's about developing new awareness, and relearning how to relate to ourselves and one another.

The Takeaway

There are plenty of organizations that aren't highly responsive to power, oppression, identity, or justice that are thriving within decentralized models like holacracy. There are plenty of organizations that are simply seeking to be more efficient, retain employees, attract talent, and disrupt old management techniques. This is the

case with much of the work being done to create new organizations in the mainstream. For such groups, wrestling with the subtler dynamics of exclusion, capitalism, colonization, and oppression may not be necessary. But those of us who want to see justice, dignity, equity, collaboration, emergence, and genuine collective action take place within our organizations need to be very clear about what we are doing and what it will take to succeed. We are not just trying to make our organizations more impactful or efficient. We are not trying to keep up with the latest management fad. We are trying to create organizations filled with compassion, wisdom, love, justice, equity, and transformative potential—things that, due to the limits of language, we are barely able to describe.

To create the organizations we crave, we must remove the barriers, and there are so many more barriers than just control-based hierarchy and bureaucracy. There is so much more between us and our dreams than just outdated organizational models and decision-making processes. New governance, management, and coordination models are an essential part of the puzzle, but we cannot pretend that they are enough. There is no new structure within which we can operate that will magically bring us the world we want to see. We have to try different strategies, see if they fit, and make adjustments within, around, and between us in order to find what we are looking for. New models promise a lot and rarely deliver. When this happens, we have to move forward—reinventing the reinventions, not reverting to the subtle tyranny of familiarity.

We will need new organizational models, new decision-making models, new personal practices, new mind-sets, new vocabularies, and new strategies in order to create the world we crave. We will need to practice deep listening, courageous self-reflection, constant learning, and resilient trust. We will also need to give ourselves a lot of anti-oppression training. As we do this, we need to make sure that we continue to deepen our understanding of why we are doing this. Is it efficiency? Is it democracy? Is it inclusion? Is it meaning? Is it purpose? Is it survival? Is it equity?

Or is it something deeper? What does it look like? How do we know when we are getting closer? If we don't get clear on our North Star, then we end up putting the same problems in new packaging, and patting ourselves on the back.

Notes

1. "Holacracy: Self-Management Practice for Organizations," Holacracy website, www.holacracy.org/.
2. See, for example, Aimee Groth, "Zappos is struggling with Holacracy because humans aren't designed to operate like software," *Quartz*, December 21, 2016, qz.com/849980/zappos-is-struggling-with-holacracy-because-humans-arent-designed-to-operate-like-software/.
3. Ethan Bernstein et al., "Beyond the Holacracy Hype," *Harvard Business Review* (July-August 2016), 38–49.
4. See Ulrich Gerndt, *Frederic Laloux*: "*Reinventing organizations*"—*Excerpt and Summaries* (Munich: Change Factory, March 2014); and Sociocracy website, www.sociocracy.info.
5. More details on the holacracy model can be found at events.holacracy.org/constitution.
6. To see this type of reframing in action, read "The Humanity of Holacracy: 4 Ways Holacracy Brings Out the Best in People," blog entry by Brian Robertson, Holacracy website, March 5, 2017, blog.holacracy.org/holacracys-human-side-36d601882d21?mc_cid=8a4c27f6a5.
7. Ibid.
8. See "Holacracy Constitution in Plain English," Holacracy website, accessed November 6, 2017, events.holacracy.org/constitution.
9. See Brian J. Robertson, *Holacracy: The New Management System for a Rapidly Changing World* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015).
10. Ibid.
11. Bertram H. Raven, "Power, Six Bases of," *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James MacGregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004): 1242–49.

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Five Elements of Collective Leadership

by Cassandra O'Neill and Monica Brinkerhoff

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP? How does it compare to a more traditional concept of leadership? Why would anyone want to use it? What are the benefits? How did it develop and what are its theoretical foundations? In this article, we outline key aspects and benefits of the process.

What Collective Leadership Is and Isn't

We have defined collective leadership as a group of people working together toward a shared goal.[1] When collective leadership is happening, people are internally and externally motivated—working together toward a shared vision within a group and using their unique talents and skills to contribute to the success. In fact, collective leadership recognizes that lasting success is not possible without diverse perspectives and contributions.

Collective leadership is a process. It is dependent on the relationships among the parts in the system, whether that system is two people working together; a classroom, team, board, or organization; or a system initiative. In collective leadership, the way the group works together makes it different from a more traditional model of leadership. How the group works together and the unique results that are possible only when this

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happens differentiate a group that is sharing leadership from one that is not.

In collective leadership, there is shared responsibility and decision making, accountability, and authentic engagement. All members are involved in creating the vision and are committed to working to achieve that vision. Collective leadership is based on the assumption that everyone *can* and *should* lead.[2] Collective leadership requires specific conditions for the success of the whole: trust, shared power, transparent and effective communication, accountability, and shared learning. It is based on the recognition that without the gifts, talents, perspectives, and efforts of many, sustainable change is difficult to achieve. Creativity is unleashed as people tap into their fullest abilities and capacities. When collective leadership is present, people say, "We have done this ourselves."

A key aspect of collective leadership is that the success depends on the leadership within the entire group rather than the skills of one person. Mary Parker Follett, whom we consider to be the mother of collective leadership, wrote about power *with* others rather than power *over* others.[3] This means that rather than having leadership limited to one charismatic person or one powerful organization, leadership is shared among many. This shift from focusing on the skills of any one individual to the capacities, relationships, behaviors, and practices of an entire group (two or more people) makes collective leadership different from other types of leadership and leadership models.

In "Leadership in the Age of Complexity," Margaret Wheatley and Debbie Frieze discuss a shift from thinking of a leader as a "hero" to thinking of a leader as a "host."[4] When a leader is the "hero," he or she is expected to have all the answers, solve all the problems, and fix everything for everyone else. The "hero" is dynamic, charismatic, and brilliant. The problem with this mind-set is that the command-and-control model often uses quick solutions that are created by a few in power (the top of an organizational chart)—and often these solutions are not well suited for the complex issues that we face today. Instead, we need leaders as "hosts": those who

have the skills to promote shared learning, effective group decision making, reflection, visioning and goal setting, and mutual accountability.

What does this shift from "hero" to "host" look like? The following table shows some of the key differences between traditional and collective leadership.

Comparison of Traditional and Collective Leadership		
	Traditional leadership	**Collective leadership**
View of organizations	Organizations as machines	Organizations as systems
Structure	Hierarchy, pyramid	Connected networks
Decision making	Top-down	Shared and/or rotated
Assumptions about people's capacity	People need to be told what to do	People are inherently capable and can be trusted to do the right thing
Beliefs about how success is created	One person has the skill or talent to create success	Success comes from the diverse perspectives and skills of many

Benefits of Collective Leadership

Collective leadership has many benefits, most resulting from the fact that you get better results from considering multiple perspectives, sharing responsibility, building upon the strengths of those on your team, and leveraging internal motivation. The following are some specific benefits you might expect to see when collective leadership is in action.

Better decisions and increased effectiveness. A major benefit is that collective leadership and multiple perspectives result in more effective decisions than when people at the top make decisions, because those who will be affected have a chance to provide feedback, ideas, and even direction.

Increased self-direction and motivation. Common challenges faced by managers are related to people resisting a change or directive. What if there were a way to easily motivate your

Collective leadership requires specific conditions for the success of the whole. . . . It is based on the recognition that without the gifts, talents, perspectives, and efforts of many, sustainable change is difficult to achieve.

team so they were able to generate their own solutions and work toward their own growth and development? There is! Just as we encourage young children to be internally motivated and to adopt a "growth mind-set,"[5] managers or others who are leading change efforts can help those around them be internally motivated. As we know is true for young children, internal motivation is much more powerful than external motivation. Those who respond to their own internal drives, interests, desires, and motivations are much more likely to work toward and sustain change than those who are externally motivated by "carrots and sticks."[6]

Removing barriers to internal motivation is needed for growth and development. Imposing change onto someone else creates resistance. All the effort from people who feel they are being told they are not doing a good job goes into defending themselves, which often looks like resistance to the people trying to "help" them. Instead, if we spend time developing relationships and finding out what others' goals and wishes are, it is possible to form a partnership to work together toward a shared goal.

Shared responsibility. In traditional models, the few people at the top often feel burdened and alone. These managers and supervisors often feel like everyone is turning to them for answers, and the pressure is exhausting. When responsibility is shared, managers feel like they are surrounded by resourceful people—and distributing the responsibility they have among others is a relief. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy are often underutilized, with an unfulfilled desire to contribute more. They are hungry for more responsibility. When the responsibility is shared, the work is easier and more fun for everyone involved.

Realizing potential. Too often, people do not get to realize their potential at work. Adopting a collective leadership approach helps people to grow and develop, not only in their current jobs and job responsibilities, but also as professionals. In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink writes that people are motivated by autonomy, purpose, and mastery.[7] This means that people are most

motivated when they feel trusted to make decisions and develop solutions, when they feel connected to the purpose of their work, and when they can do things that are challenging and that help them to grow and develop. Allowing people opportunities to develop mastery, align with purpose, and increase autonomy increases motivation and satisfaction. It also allows people to develop new skills and talents that could allow them to contribute more through their current positions, and may lead to advances in their careers.

Increased engagement and investment. When leadership is shared and cultivated, people are more engaged, energized, and invested in the goals. This happens because people have a sense of ownership of the goals: they helped create them, so they are much more invested in seeing them come to life.

Sustainability. Sustainability is often elusive without collective leadership. If everything depends on one person and that person leaves, what happens? Work grinds to a halt, or the person's absence results in missing knowledge and information that are difficult to recover. In contrast, where there is collective leadership, there will be knowledge, responsibility, and information shared across a group.

Another aspect of sustainability is to sustain a change or improvement. Take the example of quality-improvement initiatives (or quality rating and improvement systems), in which the quality of early childhood programs is the focus of change. If the change is directed by someone other than the teacher or staff, it is less likely to be continued. In contrast, when the change is driven by a partnership between the teacher and whoever is leading or supporting/directing the change, the change is much more likely to be sustained. In this dynamic of "power with" versus "power over," the teacher is actively involved in a collaborative partnership and is part of leading the change process. According to Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania, "Ineffective leaders try to make change happen. System leaders focus on creating the conditions that can produce change and that can eventually cause change to be self-sustaining."[8]

Developing Collective Leadership

Authors describing collective leadership agree that the reason this approach to leadership is so timely is that we now face complex problems.[9] In particular, knowledge workers are increasingly challenged to adapt to situations and problems that often emerge over time and do not have a clear course of action or solution.[10] Many of the daily challenges we face are not simple and don't have simple solutions. Traditional models of leadership highlight the skills and capabilities of an individual, but to effectively address the challenges we face, we need to move beyond a focus on the individual and toward the collective.[11]

When did the idea of collective leadership emerge, and where did it come from? Collective leadership is very similar to the concepts of shared leadership, democratic leadership, emergent leadership, and distributed leadership.[12] In *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, Craig Pearce and Jay Conger write that alternatives to the traditional concept of command and control leadership emerged in the early twentieth century.[13] As evidence, they write that in 1924, Follett introduced the idea of "the law of the situation," which suggested that instead of following the lead of the official authority in any given situation, people should follow the person with the most knowledge of the situation at hand.[14] This was a very different idea of leadership than what was generally accepted at the time. Because of Follett's ideas about education, leadership, and community engagement, we consider her to be the mother of collective leadership.

Over the next seventy years, many contributions to leadership and management theory helped lay the groundwork for collective leadership, but it wasn't until the late 1990s that scholars returned to the idea of shared leadership in organizations.[15]

Collective leadership has been used in a variety of fields, including community development, healthcare, educational leadership, environmental sustainability and science, nonprofit management, and even the military. Clearly, this cross-sector approach to a reimagined leadership holds promise for all fields.

Teal Organizations: Collective Leadership and Self-Direction, Wholeness, and Evolutionary Purpose

In 2014, Frederic Laloux's book *Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness* was published, and a worldwide conversation began about organizations that were operating out of what Laloux calls the "next stage of human consciousness."[16] He created a scale based on the literature about the developmental stages of human consciousness. The level or stage of human consciousness of the people founding, owning, and leading organizations determines the structures and practices in an organization. Laloux assigns the color orange to the level of the traditional hierarchical organizational structure and the color teal to organizations operating from a consciousness exhibiting a different approach to leadership.

Teal organizations utilize practices in three areas: wholeness, self-management, and evolutionary purpose. These practices are the breakthroughs from earlier levels of consciousness. The metaphor for teal organizations is that of a living system, compared with the machine metaphor for orange. Although Laloux doesn't use the term *collective leadership*, teal organizations are being operated from a collective leadership model.

Research has shown that self-managed teams are more successful and effective than "boss"-driven teams. Daniel Pink has popularized the social science research showing that the internal motivators of purpose, mastery, and autonomy are much more powerful than external motivators (carrot-and-stick approaches). Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* described in detail how twelve teal organizations operated, giving information about the different ways to design and implement next-stage organizations by adopting teal practices, including self-managing teams.

Luckily, adopting collective leadership practices is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Managers and leaders can begin to move toward what we are calling *collective leadership* and what Laloux calls *going teal*. We believe that for nonprofits and funders to reach their goals and aspirations of making the world a better place, professionals

> We believe that for nonprofits and funders to reach their goals and aspirations of making the world a better place, professionals and community members must move toward collective leadership at every level—organization, program, team, family, and community.
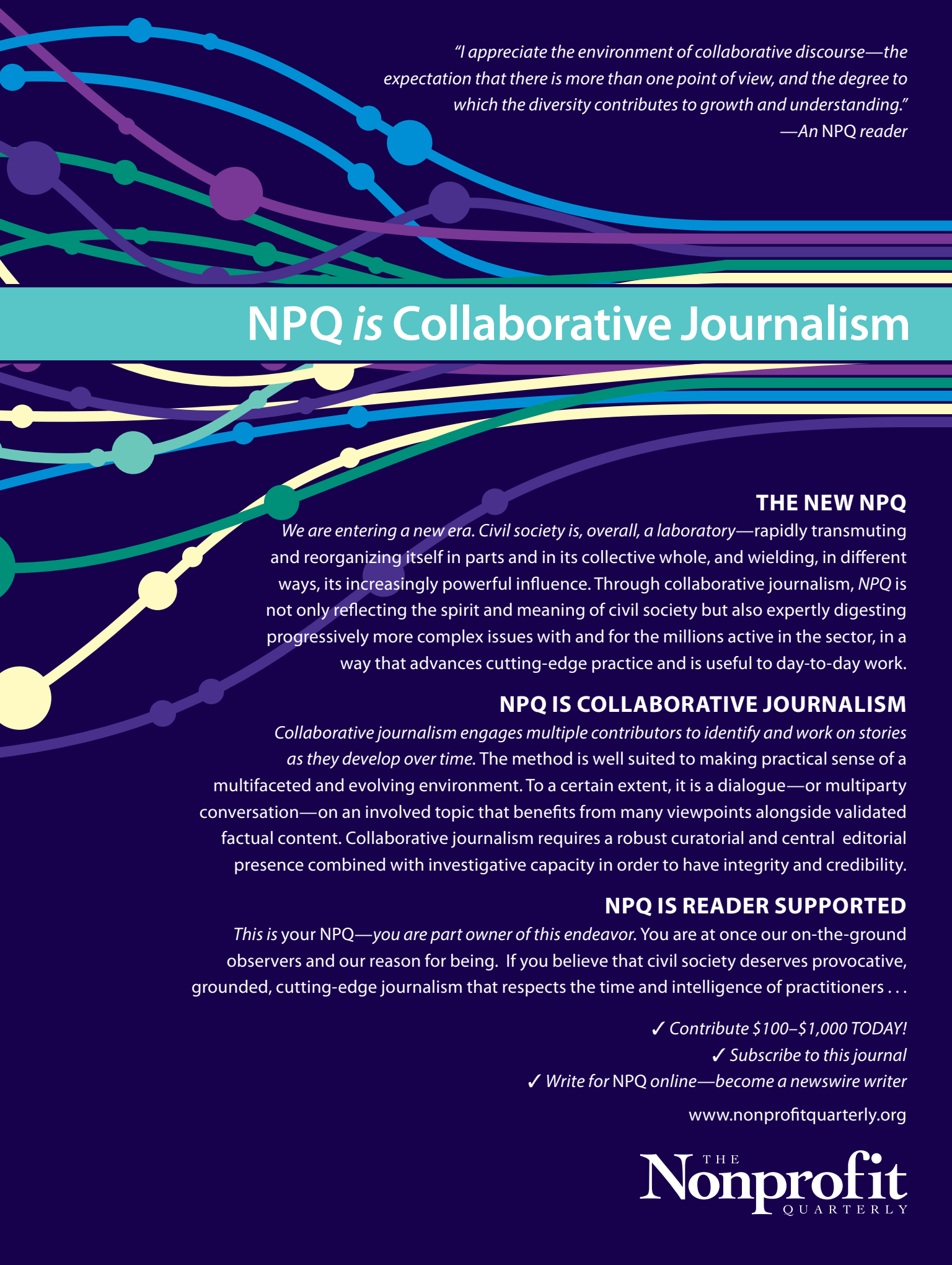
and community members must move toward collective leadership at every level—organization, program, team, family, and community. Although collective leadership is being used by some, our sector can accelerate it through intentionality. We can look for ways to do this in our daily work, whether we are working directly to help community members and families build resiliency; supporting those working in communities; advocating for policy change; funding social change and social justice work; and collaborating in networks, coalitions, or collective action initiatives. The way in which we are working toward shared community goals is just as important (if not more so) than what is being achieved along the way.

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Rethinking *the* *How* of Social Change:

Embracing the Complexities

This section focuses on how we approach social change work. The articles question the wisdom of embracing lock, stock, and barrel popular simplified models like collective impact and seductive notions like the heroic individual entrepreneur, when each day that passes it becomes more and more clear that tackling deep social change calls for a broad and complex collective effort.

T HE ARTICLES HERE TACKLE TWO MODELS OF social change. One, of quite recent origin is the collective impact model. The other is that of the social entrepreneur. As with most models, both have kernels of truth contained within yet both fall short in many ways.

Famously, the collective impact model claimed to identify five essential conditions at the core of every successful network. Some readers may know these conditions by heart, but for the uninitiated, they are: (1) have a common agenda; (2) have a shared measurement system; (3) engage in mutually reinforcing activities;

(4) have open and continuous communication; and (5) have a backbone organization in place to oversee it all.

It has been six years since collective impact hit the nonprofit world by storm, and the bloom is now off the collective impact rose. Two articles in this section tackle this issue directly. Danielle Varda, a professor at the School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado, Denver, credits the collective impact model for advancing the field by developing a "common language" that has "made it easier for people to explain what they are doing (or hoping to do)," as well as providing "funders with a way to frame how they invest in networks." It has even, Varda writes, helped policy-makers in some instances. Yet, building on the insights of Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom and others, Varda raises some red flags, noting, among other challenges, that the focus on the backbone organization can inadvertently give short shrift to the people doing the on-the-ground work. More important still, focus on the backbone ignores the critical value of informal social norms *in the community at large* that Ostrom indicates are vital to the effective functioning of networks. In particular, Varda writes, focus on the backbone organization can lead to grassroots detachment and abdication of responsibility. An ironic impact of the collective impact model, Varda suggests, is that its application can erode the very norms at the grassroots level that enable collective impact to occur.

Greg Landsman, former executive director at StrivePartnership, and Erez Roimi, entrepreneurship manager at the Rashi-Tauber Initiative, also tackle some of the shortfalls of the collective impact model based on their work in Cincinnati (for Landsman) and Israel (Roimi). StrivePartnership has often been touted as an exemplar of the collective impact model; but the authors note that the model missed critical elements of how StrivePartnership actually worked in Cincinnati, leaving out the vital role of community organizing, voter registration, and community leadership. Landsman and Roimi outline five principles of their own—shared vision, shared plans, addressing inequality, demanding systemic change, and making long-term commitments—and apply those principles to case studies based on their work.

John McClusky, founder of the Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, tackles a different model of social change—one that valorizes the heroic social entrepreneur. We all know what McClusky is talking about—how many programs can you name that award individuals for what really are collective endeavors? Of course, this is not to deny the value of the role played by the social entrepreneur—but, just as Varda and Landsman and Roimi seek to do with collective effort, McClusky wants to contextualize the social entrepreneur's role in a larger framework. In particular, he observes that the social entrepreneur typically seeks to solve problems. Sometimes a single intervention can do the trick, but then there are the so-called "wicked problems," which are not problems so much as webs of interlocking challenges. Thus, the heroic-individual model doesn't fall short merely for ignoring collective effort but also because it can misapply a problem-solving model to what are really much more multifaceted public issues. McClusky identifies quality healthcare as one example where a problem-solving approach that fails to address the ecosystem is sure to fall short.

Of course, this will not be the last time the *Nonprofit Quarterly* tackles the complexities of social change, particularly in a world where wicked problems—poverty, wealth inequality, climate change, and public health, to name just a few—are so prevalent. We hope, however, that these articles spur deeper thinking regarding these common challenges and how nonprofits can be more effective in their social change work.
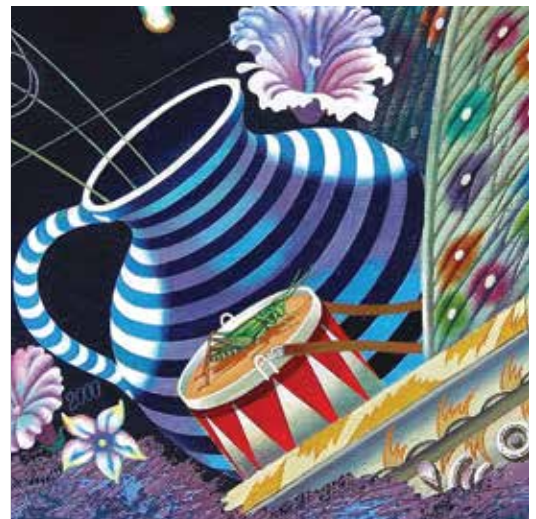
Collective Impact and Systems Change:
Missing Links

by Greg Landsman and Erez Roimi

N WINTER 2011, THE CONSULTING GROUP FSG WROTE an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) introducing the idea of collective impact.[1] Citing the work of Cincinnati, Ohio's StrivePartnership as a prime example, the article argued that "large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations."[2] FSG reviewed StrivePartnership's work, concluded that it represented collective impact in action, and developed five high-level conditions based on aspects of the work in Cincinnati that were deemed important to StrivePartnership's success: a common agenda; shared measurement; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and backbone community support.

The article launched countless collective impact efforts, led some to rename their existing work *collective impact*, and even helped a few leaders from StrivePartnership to establish a national network of communities—called StriveTogether—to support others who were doing similar work to that of StrivePartnership. FSG's portrayal of StrivePartnership, however, provided an incomplete view of the kind of systems-change

GREG LANDSMAN is CEO of the 767 Group, which supports communities in the United States and overseas in achieving large-scale community and systemic change. Landsman is former executive director of StrivePartnership, and he spearheaded the Cincinnati Preschool Promise and created Every Child Capital, a philanthropic venture fund that invests in high-impact programs that are able to attract sustainable public funding. Landsman currently serves as strategic advisor to the fund, and also provides strategic support to the Rashi-Tauber Initiative. Follow him on Twitter @greglandsman1, or contact him directly at greglandsman1@gmail.com. **EREZ ROIMI** has been involved in social entrepreneurship and community development for seventeen years. He is the Rashi-Tauber Initiative's entrepreneurship manager, and the founder and former manager of the Benjamin de Rothschild Ambassadors program, whose mission is to train the future generation of social and business leadership in Israel. Roimi is also former deputy director of the ISEF Foundation. Follow him on Twitter @erezroimi, or contact him directly at erezroimi@gmail.com.

work being pursued: it left out key structural components of the initiative that enabled sustainable social change—such as the vital importance of changing the behaviors of those operating in a system, oftentimes through leadership training, coalition building, community organizing, and a long-term commitment to change.

FSG was able to popularize the concept of collective impact—which is, arguably, a good thing: we do, of course, want people working together. But we believe that the systems-change approach, while more complicated and long term in nature, will produce more reliable improvements in outcomes, and do so in a sustainable way. FSG was able to capture a few of the headlines of the work in Cincinnati, but a more complete review of the approach would have required more time on the ground and the kind of practical experience that would have put the Cincinnati work into an understandable context. Actually doing the work exposes one to the nuances and complexities of systems-change effort. In the absence of that, a truly deep dive into an initiative is required—and even then, things will get missed.

Our intention is not to criticize FSG or the article. We recognize the challenges of fully capturing such complex work, and without going into great detail here, StrivePartnership was working on—and continues to work on—changing systems. Collective impact is, perhaps, part of the more complicated work of systems change—but only a part.

With the success that Cincinnati was experiencing, especially in terms of the partnership's shared outcomes moving in the right direction, other cities began to call, and a small cohort of communities came together to begin to share best practices. It was clear that to help other communities and continue to make progress in Cincinnati, a new entity would need to be created, and StriveTogether was the result. While FSG's article on collective impact brought additional attention to this new national work and network, the StriveTogether approach was based then—as it is today—on changing systems and the complicated work it takes to do so. Rigorous evaluations of both the StriveTogether work and the ongoing work in Cincinnati by OMG Center for

Collaborative Learning (now Equal Measure) were pursued, both of which have been helpful in better understanding the elements that must be in play to change systems for improved results—most notably, whether people within the systems were changing their actions and decisions, and what has the most impact on those behavioral changes.

StriveTogether is now a national network of over seventy communities, and has provided ongoing support to most of those communities since 2010.[3] The network goes beyond the FSG rubric to offer a more comprehensive guide for cities and regions to achieve impact at scale through systems change. It also emphasizes building results-based leadership and coalitions—key to the kind of behavioral shifts needed to achieve changes in a given system.

Because those leaders from StrivePartnership who established StriveTogether had been on the ground in Cincinnati doing the work every day, StriveTogether offered communities a more complete and rigorous approach to what StrivePartnership had always referred to as "systems-change work" than the handful of conditions offered by FSG. Again, by "systems change," StrivePartnership meant that in order to get better results, we need to change systems—which requires, among other things, changing the way people behave, how they interact with one another, how they invest, and so forth.

Changing systems does include what FSG would call a "common agenda"—which, as described by FSG, "requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions."[4] But systems change is far more complicated than that; it is also far more complicated than the other four conditions of collective impact offered by FSG.[5]

FSG would go on to provide consulting support to a countless number of projects around the globe and publish many more articles on the subject. FSG's conditions appear to help a community get started; indeed, many communities and projects leveraged FSG as they began their work. However, a year or so later, the five conditions of FSG run

out of answers to very complicated questions: How do you sustain a partnership? What are the best ways to authentically mobilize a community? What actually leads to meaningful policy change that delivers demonstrably better outcomes? Who is supposed to fund what, and how?

Cincinnati Preschool Promise and the Rashi-Tauber Initiative

In order to shed light on what could be the next generation of collective work (or, as we would say, systems-change work), and on what activities communities should pursue as they work toward meaningful and sustainable social change, below we describe two successfully developed high-impact community initiatives with which we have been deeply involved. Both address widening achievement gaps stemming from such issues as the growing number of low-income and often marginalized children and families in the United States and around the globe.

StrivePartnership spearheaded one of the most significant policy changes in the country with the Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP), a ballot initiative that was passed in November 2016. The same leadership that ran StrivePartnership for more than five years and led the Cincinnati Preschool Promise also began working with a similarly impressive effort in Israel—the Rashi-Tauber Initiative (RTI).[6] Both are good examples of systems-change work.

It is interesting, and important, to note that FSG began working with RTI when the effort first launched. As was the case in many other communities, FSG was able to help RTI get its collective work off the ground. After a year or so, however, it was clear that RTI was going beyond FSG's five conditions, especially as they relate to coalition building and organizing the communities that would be most affected by the work. That is when we began to work together, recognizing that systems change was the right approach, and that together we could share and learn from one another to strengthen what was happening in both Cincinnati and Israel.

A brief overview of both efforts and what we can learn from them to advance collective work follows:

- **The Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP).** CPP is a community-driven effort led by education and early learning advocates, preschool providers, faith and community leaders, and parents to expand high-quality preschool to more children in Cincinnati. The initial focus was on those children who need it the most—so that every child in the city shows up to school prepared to learn, and is much more likely to succeed academically and graduate prepared for college and a meaningful career. CPP was launched from StrivePartnership, which is Cincinnati's cradle-to-career education partnership.

- **The Rashi-Tauber Initiative (RTI).** RTI is a city-based, collective impact initiative led by community, nonprofit, education, and government leaders in two cities in Israel: Ashkelon and Kiryat Malachi. Both cities have sizable immigrant communities and are supported by the Rashi Foundation and the Tauber Family Foundation to better integrate investments and services along a cradle-to-career continuum. The aim is to improve the social mobility of every citizen, particularly those young people who have historically struggled to succeed academically and economically.

Three common principles have emerged from our work in these two very different communities, all of which are in line with this systems-change approach to collective work. First, new centers of power must emerge, and they must emerge from those most adversely affected by our current systems and policies. Second, leaders must be committed to the work for the long haul, as real change often takes many years to achieve. And third, in true collective-work form, a new development approach—not necessarily new programs—is vital. This article focuses primarily on the first insight—the one that has received the least attention—although we do tackle the other two, as they are critically important as well.

An Evolution: A More Complete Formula for Collective Work

Drawing on Cincinnati's effort to expand quality preschool (the StrivePartnership outgrowth), and

Three common principles have emerged from our work in these two very different communities, all of which are in line with this systems-change approach to collective work.

the city-based social mobility initiative in Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon in Israel, we offer the following supplemental elements as success factors from the field:

1. Both Community and Leaders Contribute to Shared Vision

Leaders in a community cannot alone set a shared vision or establish shared results. The community and its leadership must develop the shared vision and agenda together. Early engagement of parents, students, and other interested citizens will effectively shape the shared work and establish greater accountability for the community's leadership.

In Cincinnati, StrivePartnership spent years building a community-driven plan while simultaneously getting support from business and labor leaders, elected officials, and our faith communities. We held hundreds of house parties, community forums, town-hall meetings, and parent and preschool-provider listening sessions across the entire city.

This work paid off. When we brought CPP to Cincinnati voters in November 2016, we had hundreds of people volunteering, including over four hundred people on Election Day. The measure passed 62 percent to 38 percent, the largest margin in the history of Cincinnati school levies.[7] This victory represented the culmination of our updated collective impact process and a validation of our grassroots approach.

In Israel, RTI's collective impact effort began in September 2015 with a survey of a broad swathe of residents in both cities.[8] The survey engaged hundreds of people, including residents who historically had been left out of any community decision-making processes. This level of engagement strengthened the shared vision, goals, and measures set by the steering committees, and kept the pressure on local government to remain committed. RTI has distinguished itself as unique in a country where top-down decision making at the city level is the norm.

Accustomed as they are to seeing single-issue projects come and go, there is now palpable faith among residents, funders, and local government officials that, with multiple-sector buy-in,

the work will be sustained, even through the inevitable leadership transitions. We believe that RTI's success in Israel, with both cities now fully engaged and investing in the shared agenda, is due to the combination of deep community engagement and a distinctive focus on the process.

2. Both Formal Data and Community Voices Drive Shared Plans

Formal data, collected at the outset and on an ongoing basis, must inform the shared work. Beyond that, less traditional sources of data— community voices and ideas—ensure that the resulting actions represent what those most affected believe is needed.

In addition to conducting a survey of residents, RTI hired students in its two cities to go door to door with a questionnaire to elicit opinions from individuals who might not otherwise have agreed to participate in the process. This fact-finding took six months, and the results generated important discussions at the steering-committee level about how to ensure that the work served residents.

In Cincinnati, the RAND Corporation was hired to provide independent data on and analysis of the efficacy of quality preschool. Its report helped shape CPP's plans, but so did the many parent and provider listening sessions, in which moving stories were told and the RAND research was validated.[9] In the end, both formal research and community voices impacted the plan, but we would argue that the data collected from parents and providers was paramount in the eventual success of the CPP initiative.

3. Vision and Plans Address Inequity

When a plan or set of interventions tackles meaningful inequities, there is likely to be greater traction—both in terms of funding and community support.

The Preschool Promise offers tuition assistance to families who cannot otherwise afford high-quality preschool and provides quality-improvement grants to programs that need additional help to achieve quality. The grants are targeted toward those programs that are smaller and most likely resource poor, and in neighborhoods where it's harder to attract and keep qualified teachers.

The Preschool Promise gained widespread support because its diverse group of community leaders argued forcefully, with the backing of all that StrivePartnership had done, that these resource deficiencies were the root cause of inequities.

Israel's Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon both have sizable immigrant communities (originating from Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Russia, and Uzbekistan) that have historically struggled both academically and economically. RTI went to great lengths to locate the informal leadership, meeting with youth leaders, working families, religious leaders, and parent associations, and engaging these stakeholders early in the decision-making process and development of the shared vision and goals. RTI organized leaders from opposing political groups and held community meetings with key community leaders, asking them each to bring as many residents as they could. The result is that individuals who had tired of hearing about the latest "magic bullet" that would improve results for their community have come to trust us and the process.

4. Broad-Based Coalitions Demand Systemic Change

Community leaders who typically dominate in collective work are beneficiaries of the existing system and, though sincere about wanting change, are often reluctant to upset the status quo. Both the Cincinnati and Israel initiatives have put significant energy and time into building broad-based coalitions that demand real systemic change. Incremental change is neither sufficient nor does it inspire a broad coalition.

One vehicle for achieving this degree of change in Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon has been focus groups for residents. We are still at the beginning of our process but already have several nascent coalitions, including one focused on youth programming, which in Israel is a predictor of later success. Through the focus groups in Kiryat Malachi, we found that nearly 10 percent of the city's youth do not attend youth activities because they are embarrassed to come, and that 30 percent said they do not come because they simply did not know how to sign up. This information has

provided the foundation for a broad-based call to find ways to ease access to youth activities—which RTI is now attempting to facilitate by aligning resources and sharing enrollment data, among other things.

In Cincinnati, while most believed that the Preschool Promise was a good idea, funding it and actually realizing the program required enormous community pressure. Over the course of several years, nearly ten thousand people signed a pledge supporting new, sustainable funding for two years of quality preschool for Cincinnati's children. We gained the support of even the more reluctant leaders when community demand grew to a point where it was no longer viable not to put the Preschool Promise on the ballot.

5. Real Change Requires Long-Term Commitments

Those who want lasting change must be willing to stay committed to investing in their shared vision for many years. While any serious collective effort may produce strong results in the short run, systemic change takes time, and people on the ground will be more likely to stay engaged if they know that investors are in it for the long haul.

Within just a few years, the RTI efforts in Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon have produced very solid initial results, but it will take years before RTI can really judge its success. RTI's two founding funders—the Rashi Foundation and the Tauber Family Foundation—have been vocal about their long-term commitment. In turn, local leaders have been encouraged to consider the big picture, which means moving away from the short-term fixes that have characterized past efforts. It also means major policy changes—such as significant shifts in public and private investments in the shared work and results of the partnership—and experiencing real growth in the shared measures over several years.

In Cincinnati, bringing CPP into being was the culmination of years of organizing and coalition-building work and over a decade of collective efforts to rally a community around early learning and development. There were many times when people could have given up, but CPP's

Israel's Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon both have sizable immigrant communities . . . that have historically struggled both academically and economically. RTI went to great lengths to locate the informal leadership . . . engaging these stakeholders early in the decision-making process and development of the shared vision and goals.

investors never backed away and nor did those CPP organized on the ground. This determination and persistence are essential to successfully changing a system.

To further explore these five elements, below we provide details on our initiatives, reinforcing the need for this more complete formula for successful and sustainable collective work.

The Cincinnati Preschool Promise

CPP followed the supplemental elements offered above: both the community and the community's leaders shaped the vision and plan; formal and informal data and research were used; the effort addressed inequities both for children and for preschool providers; a broad coalition was established to bring about systemic change; and all involved had committed themselves to the vision for the long haul. In the end, as noted above, voters approved CPP—along with much-needed additional funding for local public schools—by an historic margin in November of 2016.

StrivePartnership had set community-level goals, including school readiness. For years, due in large part to the work of Greater Cincinnati's United Way Success By 6 program, Cincinnati had made progress, albeit incremental, in increasing the number of children showing up to school ready to learn. Part of this work included investments in quality preschool and a data system that allowed Cincinnati to demonstrate that children—particularly low-income children—who had quality preschool were more likely to enter kindergarten prepared and then to read on grade level by the end of third grade (a major indicator of future success).

But Cincinnati was stuck. The school readiness rates spent several years in the mid- to low-50 percent range, meaning that about half of the children in Cincinnati were showing up to school unprepared. Beginning in 2012, in response to this incremental progress in school readiness rates, StrivePartnership—alongside its many partners—launched the advocacy and organizing effort to provide two years of quality preschool it named CPP.

CPP partnered first with Leadership Cincinnati and Crossroads Community Church, and, as described earlier, went on to host hundreds of house parties and community forums, and to attend hundreds of festivals and parades—collecting thousands of signatures from people who wanted to see CPP become a reality. CPP furthered its partnership with the AMOS Project to present to and engage with dozens of faith-based organizations throughout the city. Part of that work included the building of a "People's Platform," which outlined some key provisions of CPP and preschool expansion in general: respect every child; racial equity; only good jobs; and families at the center. This helped to strengthen CPP's core values of high quality, access for all, and parent choice.

CPP also partnered with the business community and Cincinnati Public Schools to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of preschool and how best to make it work in Cincinnati. This research, produced by the RAND Corporation, helped to guide CPP's implementation work.[10] In this second report, CPP underscored the importance of trained and supported professionals as part of achieving and sustaining quality, and was also successful in including wage supports in the financial modeling that will help to ensure that preschool professionals stay in the profession.

In addition to the ten thousand pledge signers and hundreds of engaged organizations and leaders, the CPP movement helped to secure the $15 million annually through an historically successful ballot issue. CPP will expand access to quality preschool in Cincinnati, beginning with those families who could not otherwise afford it. Working with the school district and funders, CPP is now in a position to lead one of the most successful, inclusive, and meaningful preschool expansion efforts in the country.

The Rashi-Tauber Initiative

RTI is focusing initially on Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon. In both cities, leaders and community have come together to establish a compelling shared vision and better align resources on behalf of tens of thousands of citizens—beginning with young children and students—to dramatically increase social mobility for all residents.

Hundreds of leaders are collaborating across all sectors, including the forty-some leaders who comprise steering committees in Ashkelon and Kiryat Malachi. Cities, funders, community representatives, and key partners from the education and business sectors are involved.

The initiative has also made community engagement and empowerment a priority. The survey mentioned earlier involved more than six hundred individuals (three hundred in each municipality), and community leaders are consistently being engaged in the initiative and its direction through individual and group meetings. The bottom-up work appears to be paying off as an increasing number of local groups and individuals continue to inquire about getting involved.

Any collective systems-change effort needs to be data driven, and leaders have been collecting data on the emerging shared outcomes, along with relevant programmatic and budget data. These data have been assembled from official sites and from participating organizations.

Using these data (including citizen-level input), the steering committees have defined long-term shared outcomes—that is, what they felt was possible and necessary for the city and its residents to sustain long-term gains (a list of shared outcomes for each city was provided upon request). Systems-change work also provides opportunities for city leadership to set goals and targets, and manage plans and resources, in an effective and efficient way, enabling a snowball effect for the initiative.

In line with identified shared outcomes in Kiryat Malachi, RTI is now investing in strengthening youth leadership and engagement. City leaders have established a working group with representation from all municipal youth programs that, with help from a new coordinator, will invest in youth leadership, increase enrollment in their programs, share data and best practices, and track organizational and youth progress.

Working together, the youth programs believe they can increase youth group participation by 50 percent, attract three times the current number

The bottom-up work appears to be paying off as an increasing number of local groups and individuals continue to inquire about getting involved.

of older student guides, send 90 percent of their alumni to meaningful national or army service, and see 80 percent of high school graduates pursuing academic degrees or vocational studies. These and other benchmarks will be used to determine whether the investment is on track to impact the identified long-term shared outcomes.

The investment provides a very important win for the initiative. Real collective action is being pursued in a data-driven way, and community leaders are rallying around a concrete set of actions. It will also allow these communities to put the principles of collective systems-change work into practice and build meaningful data and leadership infrastructure for the next stages of work. The investment also establishes a clear model for successful city-level work on other issues.

• • •

Versions of collective work are being employed in many different settings across the United States and globally. Scholarly work by coalition-building expert Tom Wolff and colleagues, for instance, goes a long way toward updating the approach. This article, in turn, is intended to provide additional insight, drawing on our experiences in the field, to help highlight the missing links between what many call "collective impact" and the kind of systems-change work they hope to pursue.[11] To be sure, "collective impact" is a catchy way of describing a new approach to addressing social and educational challenges. But it can easily just become people working together, or some version of "collective work," and not necessarily produce significant, lasting change. In order to achieve transformative results sustained over time, a more rigorous systems-change approach is needed.

We know that new centers of power must emerge, and our efforts must help facilitate this work to empower those most adversely affected by our current systems and policies. We are optimistic about the potential of rigorous collective work to make change even in the most difficult of situations, but we are also sure that collective impact must take a from-the-ground-up approach for material and lasting social change to occur. We also know that leaders must be in it for the long haul, because systemic change takes time—and,

ultimately, effective "collective impact" requires not just new programs or shared vision and work but rather a commitment to real, systemic change.

NOTES
1. John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 36–41.
2. Ibid. StrivePartnership was formerly Strive, which is how it is named in Kania and Kramer's article.
3. *8 million Students*, *One Vision* (Cincinnati: StriveTogether, 2017), www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/StriveTogether_Overview_Brochure_Oct2017.pdf.
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5. Ibid.
6. Rashi-Tauber Initiative is also known as Rise Together Israel.
7. Bob Driehaus, "Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Mary Ronan announces retirement in August 2017: School board launching search for successor Friday," Scripps TV Station Group, Cincinnati, WCPO 9, November 17, 2016, www.wcpo.com/news/education/cincinnati-public-schools-superintendent-mary-ronan-announces-retirement-in-august-2017.
8. This was an informal survey of residents conducted by RTI staff and local students, the results of which were presented to the steering committees in both cities. The survey provided insight into what residents want from this collective work, and informed what the two steering committees would ultimately pursue in terms of a shared vision and agenda.
9. See Lynn A. Karoly and Anamarie Whitaker, *Informing Investments in Preschool Quality and Access in Cincinnati: Evidence of Impacts and Economic Returns from National, State, and Local Preschool Programs* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016).
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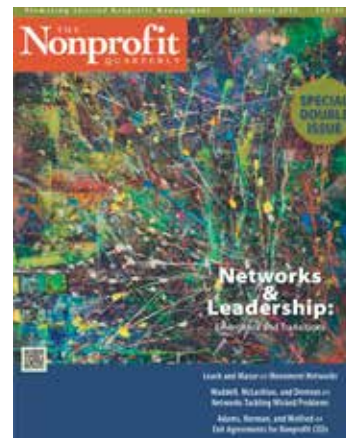
Are Backbone Organizations Eroding the Norms that Make Networks Succeed?

by Danielle M. Varda

IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY COMMON IN AGENCIES across industries and sectors for organizational missions to coalesce around the idea that by working together with diverse partners, we can collectively achieve more than anything any one of us could do alone.[1] In fact, the "network way of working" has become the norm across many organizations, communities, and even entire sectors.[2]

Networks can be multisectoral, but of course they do not have to be—they only require a collection of people and institutions with a common purpose and way of communicating and coordinating action. If you look at them this way, networks have a history as old as (in fact, older than) the nonprofit sector itself. The level of formality and centrality, the modes of leadership, and the relationships between entities have all changed fluidly with time and circumstance. But humans love to codify structures, so recently (in the last half century) we have been subject to a few attempts at doing so.

Are these structures useful, not useful, or actually destructive? Each of the attempts at codification, it seems, comes with its own problems of misplaced priorities and blindness to contextual realities that are lying in wait to pounce on the best-laid plans. So it was with attempts to force collaboration from above through funding structures for a half-century following the 1970s, and so it is with the idea of collective impact (CI), as developed by the consulting firm FSG in 2011. In this paper, however, I focus just on the assertion by FSG that collective impact models—involving cross-sectoral planning and action—must have a backbone organization. That is not only not necessarily true—the challenge is that to the extent that the backbone succeeds, it also can begin to erode community norms of collective accountability and engagement that gave rise to the network in the first place, undermining the very muscles and ligaments needed for coordinated action.

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The Network Way of Working as the New Normal—But How Do We Do It?

While the network way of working has become a sectoral norm, there is always a great deal of uncertainty about how to do it and what practices are going to lead to beneficial outcomes.[3] This makes sense, because ambiguity creates discomfort, and networks include, by definition, diverse partners and organizational missions. And while collaborating across sectors has become a familiar mantra of strong strategies and good governance among organizations, it took many of us by surprise when the collective impact framework proposed by FSG became synonymous with any and all forms of coordinated action in the public and nonprofit sectors.

If this was not on your radar when Elinor Ostrom set the stage (and subsequently won a Nobel Prize) for her work on collective action theory,[4] you might think that the collective impact model is the foundational model of how networks collaborate (or should collaborate) in today's times.[5] On the contrary, not only have organizations been perfecting the art of networks for decades via practical learning but also, for nearly as long, scholars have built upon and joined Ostrom's lifelong commitment to developing sense-making structures, models, and frameworks for coordinated action. While Ostrom's work on collective action has predominantly informed the environmental sciences on a pathway of developing incentives for coordination—determining the rules for use and institutional constraints and opportunities—the basic foundations of coordinated action toward a common goal resonate across the disciplines. No amount of new labeling can dispel the conclusion that "collective impact" is equivalent to old wine in a new bottle.

As many people know today, the CI model proposes that five conditions should be met for a network to be effective. These are: having a common agenda; having a shared measurement system; engaging in mutually reinforcing activities; open and continuous communication; and governance of a backbone organization. The authors of the model state, ". . . we believe that there is no other way society will achieve large-scale progress against the urgent and complex problems of our time, unless a collective impact approach becomes the accepted way of doing business."[6] The authors are not wrong that tackling wicked problems is going to take audacious innovative efforts; however, what *is* questionable about their statement is whether the collective impact model is "the only way"—or in fact, a way at all. Many of us are still waiting for evidence that this model is the way forward, in relation to any other model already proposed.

When the CI model first came out, some of us in the field asked a lot of questions about how it was developed. While we could not find a validation process that demonstrated that CI is an effective and successful model, we were able to buy into it. After all, we knew that the model—albeit somehow now packaged into relatable terminology and a definitive list of five best practices—was built on years of cumulative evidence from practice (along with the work of hundreds of dedicated scholars in the field) that working together is more effective than working alone. Despite the large quantity of scholarly literature and empirical research on the topic of networks and collaborative processes, it is still difficult to find the evidence for this particular model as presented.[7] As someone who has spent more than fifteen years evaluating networks and trying to figure out what makes them effective, I was especially curious about why this five-point model was spreading so quickly and was so heavily adopted despite any evidence base to support it. The CI model has been an overall positive initiative for the field of networks, as it has brought a common language to the table and made it easier for people to explain what they are doing (or hoping to do). It has even provided funders with a way to frame how they invest in networks, and policy-makers a way to legislate these kinds of efforts. That said, I'm more worried than not about the future of networks and collaborative processes with the CI model as a guiding framework.

Collective Impact—Why It Is Counter to the Foundation of Collective Action

There is little doubt that the CI model now has a legacy in the field, and its introduction by Kania and Kramer in 2011 will be regarded as a moment when things began to coalesce around a

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recognizable framework for collaboration across sectors more clearly than at any point prior. It is not clear, however, whether the five-point model was particularly pertinent or if it was simply introduced at a serendipitous moment when the field was ready for a new model. The model is now commonly used, but several important criticisms of it have been articulated—including whether a common agenda is necessary for coordinated action to be successful,[8] and the lack of a community organizing and equity approach.[9] But my primary concern, as stated earlier, is the model's assertion that networks must have a backbone organization to be functional and effective.

No one will argue that any collective effort needs to have some agency, person, or team that is coordinating things—that is almost unarguable. However, where things seem to have gone astray is in the proposition that, in order for networks to succeed, sustain, and evolve, a backbone organization (described by the CI model as an organization "with staff and specific set of skills to serve the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies"[10]) must be *a constant core function* of the effort, perpetually creating a condition of dependency on a top-down management structure. This presents several problems that could put in jeopardy the fundamental synergy of a coalesced group of motivated people that led to the rise of the network way of working.

First, the network way of working has become the predominant strategy for solving difficult problems and having social impact, because people have experienced the power and synergy of the network—namely, the power of collective energy, collective decision making, collective accountability, and collective resource sharing. Networks have bloomed and thrived because as a society we have seen and felt the evidence of what networks of organizations can achieve. I worry that, rather than building on the back of shared responsibility and accountability (likely the hardest and most important work for sustaining a network and reaching goals), the backbone model lets members off the hook and deprives networks of the very spirit in which they have thrived. In other words, members are relieved of having to be all-in regarding how the network is managed and instead are given an

easy out by having a separate entity do the work.

Second, the backbone approach asserts that a top-down structure of organizing partnerships toward collaborative processes will yield the greatest results. In fact, it has been suggested that the backbone not necessarily even be a member of the network but rather some outside entity that can be responsible for the administrative burden of running and managing it. This creates an inherently perverse power structure, where the backbone organization is not only given authority to administratively organize the network processes but is also given the role of the proxy voice of the network members. The lack of engagement in shared leadership by those most affected in the community—an outright rejection of a community organizing approach—threatens the very nature of the required shared accountability and decision making that gave rise to networks over time. "Once community collaboratives have formed using a top-down approach, converting them to models that involve community residents as equal partners—whereby they have real influence over the agenda, activities, and resource allocation—is very unlikely."[11]

Third, networks are inherently context-dependent. To suggest that any set of five practices, including a common top-down structure, will fit all (or even most) contexts is counter to the very nature of networking. Each network has its own backstory, is set in a specific context, and embedded in a unique culture. The way that people in one community relate and communicate with one another can be very different from how people in other communities relate and communicate with one another. Variations in available resources, historical experiences, traditional power dynamics, and assessed community needs make it nearly impossible to create a set of core principles for this work. What *is* consistent across communities is the need for skill development to build the capacity of all stakeholders to participate in and contribute to networks.

Didn't Elinor Ostrom Already Teach Us This Lesson?

It would be interesting to look at what theorists of this topic might say about the conditions that

foster network success. The work of Elinor Ostrom is particularly relevant in this regard.

The only woman to win the Nobel Prize in economics, Elinor Ostrom focused her work on how humans interact with ecosystems. Although her work looked specifically at how collective action toward common-pool resources such as forests, fisheries, oil fields, or grazing lands can be managed successfully by the people who use them rather than by governments or private companies, her lessons resonate across modern collective efforts to solve complex problems across the board. Ostrom taught us that collective social problems can be solved in the commons—provided there is communication among the parties that builds up trust over time, with agreed-upon rules that enable participants to engage in peer monitoring and enforcement.[12] If we apply that lesson more broadly to public goods and ecosystems that involve diverse actors across sectors, we might begin to question why, in these times, a third-party entity in the shape of a backbone organization might suddenly be so relevant and important. How did we find ourselves here, with a dominant model whose success depends on a backbone organization?

The Shift away from Shared Accountability Is Starting to Trend—Why This Is Not Good

Of the hundreds of networks that the Center on Network Science has evaluated over the last few years, those that are using the CI model of a backbone organization function and behave differently from the more traditional, grassroots types of networks that evolved over the last decade. Members using the model seem more detached from the challenge of running the network, less engaged in shared facilitation, and less committed to the accountability of ensuring network success than those not using the model. We have witnessed networks dissolve when funding for the backbone dissolves. The need for and reliance on funding has always been an issue, but we are now experiencing a time when networks are focused on raising funding for a *backbone*, and it isn't even clear whether these forms of networks in fact reflect the types of efforts that made this phenomenon a reality and a way of working.

For organizations just coming into collaborative arrangements, will they no longer remember the difficult work of bringing together a diverse group of partners and working hard to build a collective accountability system? Will they trend toward allowing proxies in place of authentic community voice? They will know that backbones put a lot less pressure on everyone to be facilitators, planners, and organizers of the work, and few will argue that this is not attractive, given the level of resources and work it takes to be a member of, and manage, a network. But if that outcome means that the network it is supporting no longer has the identity for which it was initially developed, then what are we left with?

Backbone organizations themselves are thriving. Today you can even hire consultants and firms to be your backbone agency. As a member of a review committee for a national grant-making organization, I have seen the expected move toward funding collaboration as a priority, but what continues to surprise me is the seeming acceptance of funds that historically have gone directly to organizations to deliver services and develop programming now going to backbone organizations that offer to manage the network. I worry that this shift of limited resources is no longer supporting the agencies that deliver the programming nor getting split among the partnering agencies to cover their own "relationship budgeting expenses." In turn, we see less funding for nonprofits to build capacity for programming, and more funding for capacity-building for backbone organizations. It's not clear how this is promoting a collective synergy to impact social change.

Perhaps even more problematic is that backbone organizations are beginning to ask questions about what to do when their funding is gone or their missions drift from that of the network they are managing. We have advised three backbone organizations going through this process of what to do when they no longer want to play that role. The biggest challenge is the lack of shared accountability of the members (who are mostly unwilling to take on the work of the backbone) and the backbone's uncertainty of what to do with the network of organizations that may not actually be a network at all but rather a well-managed

The need for and reliance on funding has always been an issue, but we are now experiencing a time when networks are focused on raising funding for a *backbone*.

group without a true collective process for shared governance.

How Do We Mitigate the Risks that Backbones Pose to Collaborative Processes?

It appears that we are at a crossroads. A few years into the CI model, we still do not have definitive research validating its five points. We have many good anecdotes of CI working, and some that show it did not work. In a recent project, our team analyzed one hundred cross-sector networks—some that used CI as a framework and others that did not. We found that networks that used CI were more confident in their definition of their shared mission, but they also asserted that they were far less likely to be sustainable without funding (compared to their non-CI network counterparts).

But ultimately, we really don't know what is working and what is not. What follows are a few suggestions for mitigating the risks that backbone organizations (and other parts of the collective impact model) pose to the future of collaboration and networks:

1. As a field, can we agree that we need to test and question the CI model—and every other model—more rigorously before we funnel much-needed program funds into them? The obvious challenge to doing this is the unavailability of big data to help us understand what works. As a network scientist, I know firsthand how hard it is to get these data, but we need to get past the barriers and embrace the challenge.

2. Let us invest in network members— not backbone organizations only—and commit to building the capacity of all stakeholders to participate. Network leadership is a skill all members need, not just the backbone members. Can we consider all members of the network responsible for moving the work forward, in the capacity that best suits the network? Can we get back to shared responsibility and accountability? Can we agree to move away from a top-down governance model and return to approaches that encourage shared accountability and a more

balanced power structure? Backbones need to have an exit strategy. This commentary is not to question whether collaboratives need to be organized and managed—they do—but rather to push back on the concept that backbones are continuously required for the success of the network. Backbones may have a core function, but a successful backbone should have an exit strategy, where the backbone aims to remove itself and leave the network to survive and prosper on its own. I would encourage all networks to ask what they have left if they remove the backbone from the picture. If the answer is that the network does not exist in that case, then perhaps it is not actually a network at all but rather a well-managed group of organizations. To reap the benefits of a network—the synergy that exists when a committed group of organizations and people work together to solve a problem—a structure must exist that does not require a perpetual external backbone as the glue. Instead, it requires an interconnected web and equitable distribution of authority, responsibility, accountability, and decision making.

I think most will agree that networks are pretty exciting, and that when they align across all the important factors, we can witness a big impact. The network way of working has evolved from the years when networks were viewed by many as novel and only seen in niche areas to being a standard way of operating in organizations. I believe it is important that we continue to ask for evidence of effectiveness as models get introduced that propose guiding principles, before we redesign and funnel scarce resources to following them. It is important to examine if such models are stripping networks of the very spirit in which they have thrived. And, at a minimum, we should be building the evidence base to show what works, and not fall prey to trends that risk diminishing capacity for our nonprofit and public-sector organizations as they try to follow the path to sustainability and impact.

> I would encourage all networks to ask what they have left if they remove the backbone from the picture. If the answer is that the network does not exist in that case, then perhaps it is not actually a network at all but rather a well-managed group of organizations.

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Disproving the Hero Myth of Social Entrepreneurship

by John McClusky

N "Social Entrepreneurship's All-American Mind Trap," published in the *Nonprofit Quarterly*'s summer 2017 issue, Fredrik Andersson and Ruth McCambridge explore how this type of social-purpose initiative is "being imaged and defined as an act primarily of an individual rather than a collective."[1] The authors present and support several cogent claims that call into question the extent to which such "Lone Ranger" entrepreneurship is the prevailing type and, most significantly, whether or not it is as suitable as collective entrepreneurship to successfully address the most "wicked," perplexing problems our society and the world face—including "poverty, hunger, racism, and environmental deprivation."[2] In this article, I elaborate on three of Andersson's and McCambridge's assertions: (1) the necessity for employing what they call "collective entrepreneurship"; (2) the necessity of large, cross-sector collaborations and other collective initiatives that align public policy,

financial resource, and comprehensive services components to tackle "wicked problems," instead of initiatives launched by an individual entrepreneur; and (3) that "wicked problems" are inherently public issues—namely, that they are highly contentious topics affecting a broad population in a given jurisdiction about which there are multiple, deep-seated, conflicting stakeholder interests and perspectives. Understanding them simply as "social problems" for which there are "innovative solutions" is a fundamentally insufficient framework.

Collective Entrepreneurship

Andersson and McCambridge contrast "individual" with "collective" social entrepreneurship, stating that they represent two "warring frameworks" for understanding social change and innovation in American culture. The former they label the "Lone Ranger story," which is insistent and deeply embedded in our nation's cultural

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mythology. The latter they label the "community will narrative," and describe the power and necessity of a committed group with "multiple anchors of commitment informed by multiple points of view and streams of information" to bring about effective, sustainable social change in our complex world.[3]

Indeed, collective entrepreneurship entails action beyond a committed group to more complex networks, coalitions, and collaborations composed of multiple stakeholder interests and groups. The necessity for this kind of effort *and* the distinctive leadership mind-sets and repertoire of skills that collective entrepreneurship requires are long established in various strands of academic and practice literature on social change, especially when it comes to addressing wicked problems. They compose a rich body of "lessons learned." Had we heeded these lessons, many recent or current approaches to tackling wicked problems, such as the collective impact movement, likely would have avoided a good deal of early, exasperating effort when putting the ideas into concrete practice. To their credit, leading authors of that movement, such as John Kania and Mark Kramer, have over time expanded their understanding of the leadership attributes and collective strategies needed for collective impact to succeed, including recognizing—as many decades of study already had—that it is an "emergent" process and requires the participation of a very broad, inclusive range of stakeholders and voices across a community's sectors and social strata.[4]

In fact, there is a long history in this sector of collective action aided by many decades-old practices of community/adult education and community development (as the concept was originally understood), incorporating collectively generated and pursued action to make a community stronger and more resilient. The United Nations, for instance, defines community development as "A process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems."[5]

In 1994, in their book *Collaborative Leadership*, David Crislip and Carl Larson elaborated the distinctive mind-sets and skills needed for collaborative leadership. To highlight some of its features, it was the most suitable style when faced with a *situation* in which: (1) there is no single, predetermined group objective; (2) the problem or issue the collective is addressing cannot be identified in advance—nor can its solution be known, but "must emerge from the interaction of the stakeholders"; and (3) no single or few areas of expertise can be applied. Then, the *leadership task* is to: (1) convene and catalyze others to cocreate visions and solve problems; (2) convince people something can be done, not tell them what to do; (3) build stakeholder confidence in the process by cultivating relationships that build mutual trust and respect and are participatory and inclusive; (4) forgo exercising power from a position in a hierarchical structure, relying instead on one's "credibility, integrity, and ability to focus on [and sustain] the process"; and, finally, (5) be a peer, a cocreator of possible solutions, not the superior expert. In short, they described many of the characteristics of situations we face when attempting to bring about truly significant social change, as well as several of the leadership tasks that must be performed in these situations.[6]

What Is Required to Tackle Wicked Problems?

Andersson and McCambridge stress that collective—not Lone Ranger—leadership is necessary to address wicked problems (drawing on the earliest definitions of the term by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber in their 1973 article, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning"). Rittel and Webber defined wicked problems as "issues with innumerable causes—problems that are tough to fully comprehend or define, and that don't have a single and/or correct answer."[7] Such problems differ from "ordinary" problems in four characteristics, including not "being self-contained but entwined with other problems without a single, root cause," and involving many stakeholders "who all will have different ideas about what the problem really is and what its causes are."[8]

Going beyond their view, I propose that problems are best understood not as a binary choice between "ordinary" and "wicked" but rather as a continuum stretching from the simplest, most self-contained to the most wicked and complex.

Had we heeded these lessons, many recent or current approaches to tackling wicked problems, such as the collective impact movement, likely would have avoided a good deal of early, exasperating effort when putting the ideas into concrete practice.

For those problems that are very wicked, they are best understood and addressed not through a problem-solving framework but a public-issues one. Understanding and acting upon wicked problems solely from a problem-solving framework—as if through discussions among multiple stakeholders a single definition of the problem can be determined and "innovative," "data-driven" solutions can be discovered—is self-defeating. Public issues entail matters important to a large part of the population in a given political jurisdiction about which there are multiple, deep-seated, and conflicting interests, stakeholder understandings, and proposed answers. They are "issues" because they are highly contentious. Affordable quality healthcare for all is but one contemporary example. Public opinion is deeply divided about whether or not "all" have the right to such care, and how much people of different levels of wealth or income should pay for it. Furthermore, there is a blossoming variety of public-sector, business, health-professional and industry, insurance, citizen, consumer, nonprofit, philanthropic, and religious interests with differing viewpoints—and, in some cases, solutions—to propose. Of course, understanding the issues and evaluating different proposed approaches need to be based on robust data, evidence-based practices, and highly competent policy analysis—but these are just a few of the essential ingredients, beyond the ingredient of the will of those affected.

Therefore, large, cross-sector, multistakeholder collaborations and other collective efforts are required to tackle wicked problems—not just good teamwork among a comparatively small group of organizations—no matter how much diversity is represented with respect to skills, perspectives, and community experience. Whether attempting to revitalize underserved, disinvested, low-income communities or attempting to achieve affordable quality education or healthcare for those who lack such opportunities, a very wide range of assets, resources, perspectives, talents, and knowledge from diverse sectors, races, genders, classes, and so on must be brought to bear. These efforts need to take place at many levels of analysis and action, bringing together a multitude of leaders at the grassroots and grasstops levels and all social strata in between. Concurrent, aligned action on public policy, funding, and comprehensive services is required. This is exceedingly difficult, painfully slow, complex work that requires a very long commitment.

This is also work that requires incredible collective persistence and resilience in the face of fierce headwinds. Why? Because when changes in public policy and financial resource allocation are necessary (in addition to services) for a given population or community, proposed strategies and solutions must entail some degree of redistributed resources and opportunity. This means the effort is likely to be resisted by well-entrenched interests. Success will entail mobilizing political action and may require engaging social movements as well as more traditional, institutionalized collective enterprises.

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Having for several years advised and/or observed collective initiatives addressing wicked problems such as racial inequity and underserved, disinvested communities—in addition to participating over five decades in national social movements—it is clear to me that collective, collaborative leadership among a very inclusive multitude of stakeholders, and not a "hero" social entrepreneur, is what is necessary for substantial social change. And the members of the collective leadership must demonstrate authentic, persistent effort to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of a wide array of individuals and groups—particularly those whose experiences and circumstances are most dissimilar to their own—when working on a shared issue.[9] Finally, and perhaps most disappointing to those who might wish otherwise, a redistribution of power or resources of any kind—when there are vested interests currently commanding a large portion of those resources—likely will never occur without conflict. Therefore, whatever is perceived to be "heroic" action by some may well be viewed as the opposite by others. To exercise leadership in such situations, often people must pick sides.

NOTES

1. Fredrik O. Andersson and Ruth McCambridge, "Social Entrepreneurship's All-American Mind Trap," *Nonprofit Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 28.

2. Ibid., 30–31.

3. Ibid.

4. Their updated statement of practice principles has expanded to include several that this earlier literature suggested, such as engaging people as full participants from the communities and populations the initiative seeks to serve; recruiting and cocreating with cross-sector partners; and building a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants. For more on this, see Tamarack Institute; *The Latest*; "Collective Impact Principles of Practice," blog entry by Devon Kerslake, June 3, 2016, www.tamarack community.ca/latest/collective-impact-principles -of-practice.

5. UNTERM: The United Nations Terminology Database, "Community Development," cms.unov.org/UNTERM/Display/Record/UNHQ/NA /bead44b0-ac66-48f8-86b1-ff78c6c334da.

6. David D. Crislip and Carl E. Larson, *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 1994). For a comprehensive review of the literature from that period on collaboration and what factors foster or hamper its success, see the meta-analysis of an original sample of 133 studies by Paul W. Mattessich and Barbara Monsey, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992).

7. Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (June 1973): 155–69.

8. Ibid.

9. These observations include the author's work with the following major collective initiatives in the St. Louis bi-state metropolitan area: Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis; Social Innovation St. Louis; Interfaith Partnership of Greater St. Louis; Ready by 21; and East Side Aligned. They are also based on participation and occasional modest leadership in the civil rights, antiwar, women's, and other social justice movements over five decades.

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Fiscal Sponsorship:

A Response to the Overinstitutionalization of the Civil Sector

The first article in this section explores the role fiscal sponsorship could play in a futuristic nonprofit model. The second article looks at how fiscal sponsorship can be helpful to fledgling nonprofits. But whether part of a sci–fi vision or a more down-to-earth practical consideration, fiscal sponsorship is worthy of attention. For, as Andersson and Neely stress, "The problem is not too many new nonprofit ideas; the problem is how to carry them forward in a way that increases the chance for new ideas to take root and transform into innovations that add real value." Fiscal sponsorship offers one way forward.

FISCAL SPONSORS HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR QUITE some time. These organizations provide a corporate umbrella to smaller groups—often, but not only, start-ups—so that they may receive funding without being overwhelmed by the administrative requirements of a stand-alone organization. Why might conversation about fiscal sponsorship be particularly important right now? In a time of active experimentation in terms of programs and organizational form, and in a context of some turbulence, the ability to test ideas without setting up formal organizations to hold them becomes increasingly important. One of the two articles in this section explores the fit of available fiscal sponsorship to that dynamic environment, and the other looks at the current state of the field.

So, again, context is an important component in the timing of this conversation—but the option of fiscal sponsorship over establishing a separate organization should long ago have been more in play. The fact is, after a certain developmental point, there is almost always a tense undercurrent between what is best for an institution versus what is best for its mission and constituents. This jockeying for the heart and soul of a nonprofit does not have to occur if you can test the waters first to gauge if you want and need a corporate setting for your work.

Frances Kunreuther wrote about the siren song of incorporation back in 2003, in an article titled "To 501(c)(3) or Not to 501(c)(3): Is That the Question?" (nonprofitquarterly.org/2003/12/21 /to-501c3-or-not-to-501c3-is-that-the-question/). Back then, Kunreuther wrote:

> The decision about whether to incorporate is fundamental. Rather than assuming that incorporation is necessary, groups—and those who advise them—face the challenge of making a thorough and conscious decision about incorporation while being attentive to maintaining the vitality of the vision and mission of the work. So, to 501(c)(3) or not to 501(c)(3), that is an important question.

And then there is our social and organizational context, which seems every day to become more amenable to using common platforms for diverse efforts. In a way, being a fiscally sponsored organization is akin to being a donor-advised fund, where there is also no need for unnecessary structure of your own if, in fact, you can share corporate structure with no negative results and fewer costs, both financial and emotional.

Of course, in a strange confluence of trends, we are now in an era in which it is ever easier to be approved as a nonprofit, even if you have little to recommend you to that status.

Has the full-on formal organization gone the way of the dodo? Of course not. But is there a way that the nonprofit institution can sometimes own us in a way that is not necessarily good for the basic mission and effort? Absolutely. Read on.

Star Trek and the Future of the Nonprofit Sector

by Vu Le

L ET'S FACE IT: THE LAST FEW MONTHS HAVE BEEN brutal. Dealing with the constant threats to communities and to democracy itself has been exhausting and heartbreaking, and many of us have been questioning whether we nonprofits are equipped to respond to current and future challenges. During these dark times, there has been at least one bright light: A new *Star Trek* show!

When hatred and xenophobia are on the rise, it's nice to see a universe where diversity is accepted as a norm. From the two episodes I've seen, the new show *Star Trek: Discovery* is awesome. It's not without flaws, of course, but this show, and *Star Trek* itself, paints a hopeful picture that we nonprofits should observe closely. And the Starfleet model in particular is something we should study.

In *Star Trek*, there are various starships. Each has a different captain and a different mission. However, they are bound together by Starfleet, an organization that supports and coordinates the work of all the ships. Starfleet is big, with multiple departments: There's Starfleet Academy, which trains officers; Starfleet Command, which provides governance; Starfleet Shipyard, which builds the ships; Starfleet Judge Advocate General, which serves as the judiciary branch; and so on.

The nonprofit sector as it exists can be compared to *Star Trek*, but without the many Starfleet-like organizations to coordinate everyone. In *Star Trek*, there is a "Prime Directive" that governs Starfleet: Don't interfere with other civilizations' development. Our sector, too, has a prime directive. Perhaps it is social justice; perhaps it is just making the community better overall. But the way we are organized does not allow us to achieve that prime directive effectively. Every organization is expected to do its own HR, finance, evaluation, communications, IT, fundraising, governance, and so on. Meanwhile,

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we compete with one another for resources, and we often have no idea what other nonprofits are doing. It is incredibly inefficient, perpetuates the Nonprofit Hunger Games, screws over grassroots organizations led by marginalized communities, and leaves us scrambling to respond to the horrifying social and political climate bearing down on our communities.[1]

After the elections, when the executive orders were destroying families and tearing communities apart, I met with a well-respected nonprofit director of color. He told me that he had spent hours on YouTube learning how to make entries in QuickBooks. Another leader of color told me that she had spent thirty hours writing a grant proposal for $5,000. This is what our sector considers normal: taking visionary leaders and organizations and forcing them to spend half their time on administrative tasks and fundraising. This philosophy is so pervasive that I remember telling a brilliant artist/musician who leads a youth organization to "stop focusing so much time on writing songs and poems with kids and spend more time on building infrastructure."

It's time for us all to abandon our outdated practices and move into the future. The *Star Trek* analogy is not perfect. Starfleet is an extremely rigid, militaristic, and hierarchical organization in which ship captains rank lower than Starfleet leaders and are told where to go and which ship to command. Many of those philosophies and practices would not work, and many would even be harmful when translated into the nonprofit sector. Still, we can learn a thing or two. We can use these lessons to implement a better model— let's call it the Community Alliance model—that dispenses completely with the notion that nonprofits must be their own entities, responsible for dozens of highly complex tasks in addition to programming. The nonprofit of the future is defined by shared administrative, operating, and fundraising support that allows each organization significant time and resources to focus on individualized programmatic work, as well as collective efforts to address systemic issues. What this might look like:

- **There will be supporting entities that provide shared back-office support.**

Instead of every organization having its own bookkeeper, CFO, HR director, evaluator, IT director, and so on, the supporting entity will have teams handling those things for everyone—not teaching them how to do it but actually doing it for them. Community Alliance members pay a sliding-scale fee based on their budget for these services. This will create an economy of scale that will benefit all members.

- **Fiscal sponsorship will be something not frowned upon, but encouraged.** This model may require Alliance members to put their own 501(c) status on hiatus to go under the fiscal sponsorship of the supporting agency. That sounds a little creepy—OMG, the Borg is annexing everyone!—but that's because fiscal sponsorship has been given a bad rap. There is a lot of stigma around it, so one of the most effective tools at our disposal is looked upon with fear or disdain by many in our sector.[2] This results in many organizations becoming or remaining 501(c) organizations, despite their complete lack of interest in or capacity to handle administrative functions.

- **Executive directors will be more focused on the mission.** Each organization will still have its own executive director or CEO. These leaders will be able to devote significantly more time to mission and programming and collaborations with other leaders, since they will not need to focus as much energy on operations. According to *Daring to Lead 2006*, a report by CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation, the lack of administrative support is a key contributor to executive director burnout in small and medium-sized organizations. "Executives report that finance and fundraising are at once their least favorite aspects of the job and the areas in which they most want to build their skills."[3] Probably because they have no choice in our existing model.

- **Boards will be more focused on vision, strategy, and advocacy.** Many boards, especially in smaller organizations, spend a lot of their time in operations. Some are very focused on their fiduciary and legal responsibilities. Unfortunately, that often leaves out one of the board's most important roles: representing the

This model may require Alliance members to put their own 501(c) status on hiatus to go under the fiscal sponsorship of the supporting agency. That sounds a little creepy—OMG, the Borg is annexing everyone!—but that's because fiscal sponsorship has been given a bad rap.

interests of the community at large and ensuring the organization is achieving its mission, vision, and values. In this Community Alliance model, they can now focus more on these critical areas.

- **Fundraising will be a combination of individual and joint efforts.** Each organization in a Community Alliance continues to raise funds (fiscally managed by the supporting organization) for its own individual mission. There may also be joint efforts to raise funds for the entire Alliance, however. Some Alliances may explore a co-op–like model, where funds are raised and then shared equitably among Alliance members. There will still be occasional points of tension among Alliance members due to funding challenges, but the constant communication and cooperation among members will lead to greater funding for the sector overall. The combined power of organizations working together will significantly help bring about effective funding practices, such as multiyear general operating funds and a culture of abundance, not scarcity.

- **There will be a system of mutual support among members.** Effective Community Alliances are grounded by a set of strong and deeply held values, one of which is the mutual care and respect that members have for one another and that exists between members and the support organization. The support organization will step in to coordinate assistance during crises—for example, sending in a staff person to serve as an interim executive director if there is a leadership transition. As another example, a reserve fund may be established by the support organization so that when a member is having financial shortages, it can tap into this fund.

- **Organizations focus on programs but also work together on systemic issues.** As operations are taken care of by the support organization, each organization and its staff have significantly more time to work on planning and running programs. This is what many organizations and leaders were meant to do, are good at, and should be doing. In addition to their individual work, they also have more time and resources to deeply collaborate to address the systemic challenges facing our communities—including poverty, homelessness, and racism.

- **Organizations may spin off or remain permanent members as appropriate.** Some organizations are large and may need their own internal operations and have no interest in shared services (although this may be an issue of perception, as there are organizations that are fiscally sponsored that have budgets over $6 million). Or some organizations grow in size and need to spin off from their fiscal sponsor. That's okay. We just need to get away from this "incubator" mentality, where all organizations must inevitably spin off as a default. If being a member of an Alliance is allowing the member to do the work effectively, there is no pressure to force nonprofits to become independent organizations. Starfleet does not tell the *Enterprise*, "Hey, you can only be a part of this for three years, and then you gotta be on your own."

I know the Community Alliance model sounds idealistic or fantastical, but this is not a new idea. TSNE MissionWorks, Tides, Community Partners, and others have been pioneering many of these concepts for years. The National Network of Fiscal Sponsors has been advancing best practices around fiscal sponsorship since 2004. The Nonprofit Centers Network has been supporting organizations vis-à-vis the concept of shared office spaces since the early 2000s.

And my organization, Rainier Valley Corps (RVC), is piloting this concept in Seattle. Our flagship program is our fellowship, where we train and send leaders of color into organizations led by communities of color, in which they work full time for two years to develop these organizations' capacity. We provide these fellows with a living wage and strong benefits. After talking to our fellows and community leaders, it became clear that capacity building must be holistic, incorporating many elements working simultaneously together. Thus, we have expanded beyond the fellowship program. We are starting to become a support organization that will be providing back-office services

(currently financial management, HR, payroll, and legal) as well as capacity-building coaching and convening organizations around peer learning and collective power.

RVC has partnered with Families of Color Seattle (FOCS) to pilot our back-office support program, and already the results are amazing. Freed to focus on its critical work, FOCS has been on fire, providing programming to families with kids of color around identity, undoing racism, and teaching equity in schools and communities. And now we are in discussion with other organizations that are interested in joining the RVC Alliance. It's still in an experimental stage; we are still exploring how to provide back-office services most effectively, as it is currently not clear what structures or systems are the best path forward for RVC and our partner organizations in Seattle.

It's clear, though, that the current model that governs our sector is not working. A report from the Management Assistance Group points out the challenges faced by small nonprofits around operations:

> The impacts of not finding better solutions to these back-office needs include: inefficiency and burnout; high staff turnover, cash flow crises, loss of funding, missed opportunities, diminished impact and threats to growth and sustainability. At best, these are enormous distractions for leaders of small nonprofits. At worst, the lack of adequate back office infrastructure is responsible for their ineffectiveness in achieving their mission . . . and incalculable human and financial waste.[4]

The Community Alliance model, however, is about more than just back-office support and economy of scale. It is also about peer learning, creating collective wealth, collaborative and strategic advocacy, and building community power. Our sector has been divided long enough, the Nonprofit Hunger Games have been going on way too long. For the Alliance model to work, though, all of us have to reconsider the way we've been thinking about and doing things:

- **Nonprofits.** We need to get over the idea that we must all do our own operations. We need to

assess whether having our own operating staff is the most efficient route, or if going under the wings of a fiscal sponsor or forming an Alliance will be more effective. Many of the things we assume to be true may not necessarily be what's most effective or what's best for our communities. Because the vast majority of nonprofits are small or midsize, and continue to struggle to do their programmatic work while simultaneously handling a dozen or so highly specialized skills, we ought to rethink whether we should be doing our own finances. Or HR. Or IT. Or legal. Or insurance. Or payroll. Let's think of what we can do when these tasks no longer consume our organizations' time and energy.

- **Funders and donors.** Funders and donors: you have been encouraging nonprofits to collaborate more—possibly even to merge—and to be more innovative. The Community Alliance model does all those things. To make it work, though, you all need to take more risks. You need to remove the biases you have against organizations that are fiscally sponsored. In fact, you should view these organizations as bold and focused on mission, and fund them generously. You need to give significant amounts of funding to these Alliances as well, and work with them as partners to ensure the model succeeds. And you must prioritize funding Alliances that are led by and serving people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ people, women, rural communities, and the like. And critically, you must directly fund each member in the Alliance and not use networks and collaborations as a way to just give money to one backbone or support organization that then trickles down to far less money for each individual organization involved.

- **Capacity builders.** Fellow capacity builders, we have to get out of this mind-set that we must train every organization to do everything. As I mentioned in past articles, this default "Teach a person to fish" mentality of capacity building is archaic and ineffective.[5] Most organizations are carpenters, and we're forcing them to spend half their time fishing—HR fishing, evaluation fishing, financial management fishing—and

then we wonder why not enough houses are being built. If an organization is an amazing carpenter, our job as capacity builders is to give them the fish so that they can do their work. Everyone needs to do what he or she is good at.

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The Community Alliance model is just a natural progression in terms of how nonprofits relate to and work with one another. We've been talking about collaboration for decades now, but it has all been very superficial, often just resulting in more meetings and maybe a joint event or publication. It's time we think more ambitiously. We can more effectively address the challenges facing our communities when all of us are aligned, sharing resources, supportive of one another, and working together to push for systems change.

Notes

1. *Nonprofit: Always Fresh*; "The Nonprofit Hunger Games and what we must do to end them," blog entry by Vu Le, August 3, 2015, nonprofitaf.com/2015/08 /the-nonprofit-hunger-games-and-what-we-must-do-to -end-them/.

2. *Rainier Valley Corps*; "The Stigma Against Fiscal Sponsorship Needs to End," blog entry by Vu Le, June 14, 2017, rainiervalleycorps.org/2017/06/stigma-fiscal -sponsorship-needs-end/.

3. Jeanne Bell, Richard Moyers, and Timothy Wolfred, *Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2006), 22.

4. *Outsourcing Back-Office Services in Small Nonprofits: Pitfalls and Possibilities* (Washington, DC: Management Assistance Group and the Meyer Foundation), 2.

5. See, for instance, *Nonprofit: Always Fresh*; "Capacity Building 9.1: Give someone a fish, let them focus on carpentry," blog entry by Vu Le, October 3, 2016, nonprofitaf.com/2016/10/capacitybuildinggivesome oneafish/.

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Fiscal Sponsorship:
A Hidden Resource for Nonprofit Entrepreneurs

by Fredrik O. Andersson and Daniel Gordon Neely

A group of people who wish to activate themselves collectively to get something done—a bridge saved, land mines deactivated, a pipeline stopped—do not need to incorporate or become a 501(c)(3). In fact, there are plenty of reasons to delay this step until you are certain that you need a permanent structure that can grow with you over time. Let's be clear: You can gather a governing body, receive grant funding, hire staff, and be administered compliant to the law—all without your own nonprofit—by using an umbrella mechanism known as a *fiscal sponsor*. This helpful mechanism, however, exists in a wide variety of forms and comes at a relatively wide range of cost, both in terms of cash payments and general organizational friction and angst. Wise entrepreneurs inform themselves about the available options—what do I get at what cost and at what level of risk?—and move to contract or reject the entire proposition from there. This article provides a bird's-eye view of fiscal sponsor types and arrangements, so that practitioners considering making use of or providing such arrangements can develop their own threshold questions.

WHILE THERE ARE MANY NONPROFIT ENTRE-preneurs with plenty of energy and fresh perspectives eager to enter the nonprofit sector, the start-up stage can be an immensely challenging and vulnerable time for an emerging organization. The precariousness of this stage demonstrates the need and value of an accommodating infrastructure that can assist and nourish emerging nonprofits as they attempt to create greater stability. In this article, we focus on one such supporting infrastructure: *fiscal sponsorship*.

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The presence and work of fiscal sponsors in the nonprofit sector are not new, yet fiscal sponsorship remains a seldom-discussed topic in the mainstream nonprofit practitioner or research literature. Below, we look at the variety of organizations and relationships encompassed within the field of fiscal sponsorship, and discuss some of the practical considerations and trade-offs that groups may experience when they contract with a fiscal sponsor.

The Challenge of Starting and Operating a New Nonprofit

The United States' nonprofit sector has long engaged the activities of millions of individuals—and every year, a multitude of new nonprofit groups and organizations are being formed and launched. However, the exact number of new nonprofits is difficult to pin down. The steady flow of new entrants clearly suggests that the nonprofit sector is both attractive and accessible to individuals wanting to initiate the process of starting new nonprofit activity, usually by founding a new nonprofit organization. As noted by nonprofit management and philanthropy expert Peter Frumkin, the nonprofit sector represents a highly appealing place for people wanting to take a chance to make a difference: "Almost anyone with an idea or vision can found a nonprofit or voluntary organization quickly," because of the sector's low entry barriers. However, Frumkin adds, moving from the idea stage to actually operating and maintaining a new nonprofit venture is a much more challenging endeavor.[1] Consequently, as Susan Kenny Stevens has commented, the earliest stage of new nonprofit ventures is not just highly time-consuming and demanding of ample commitment from the nonprofit entrepreneur but also the most fragile stage in a nonprofit's life.[2]

Organizational researchers have long recognized this fragility by pointing to the problems associated with newness as well as smallness, and the vital importance for new and emerging ventures to attain a certain degree of stability— for example, securing an input of vital resources and building an ability to manage and utilize such resources in order to overcome the vulnerabilities emanating from these liabilities.[3] In his seminal essay "Social structure and organizations," Arthur Stinchcombe painted a highly compelling picture of the steep challenges facing emerging organizations.[4] He particularly underscored the vulnerability facing such organizations, which starts from the point at which individuals attempt to explore and implement ideas and to search for resources to propel the idea forward. Stinchcombe's essay especially emphasized how new organizations suffer a heightened risk of failure because entrepreneurs must engage in so many vital activities more or less simultaneously, which often ends up being an overwhelming task.

As a consequence and as a general rule, anyone trying to create a new organization must find ways to handle what Stinchcombe refers to as the "liability of newness."[5] In this context, fiscal sponsors appear to represent a potentially vital capacity for fledgling nonprofits by offering a support infrastructure to handle some of the burden associated with being a start-up.

What Is a Fiscal Sponsor?

One available option for tackling some of the challenges of newness is to use a fiscal sponsor. A fiscal sponsor is an already existing nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status that has agreed to provide a legal home and support for currently non-tax-exempt entities. Some in the nonprofit community refer to fiscal sponsors as fiscal agents, but as noted by Gregory Colvin, the term *fiscal agent* implies that the project or charity being sponsored controls the charitable organization providing the fiscal sponsorship (i.e., the sponsor is an agent of the sponsored).[6] However, this is the reverse of the actual relationship allowed by law. The law allows for a 501(c)(3) organization to sponsor a project or nonexempt organization. Thus, the term that appropriately defines the sponsor is *fiscal sponsor*.

Although there is no one commonly agreed-upon definition of a fiscal sponsorship, the principle is essentially understood to be the same across the board. The National Network of Fiscal Sponsors defines fiscal sponsors as ". . . nonprofits that advance the public benefit by facilitating the development and growth of charitable, mission-driven activities;"[7] from the

perspective of the nonprofit entrepreneur, a fiscal sponsor offers an opportunity to have a formal legal home without having to spend significant time and resources to incorporate a new public charity. In other words, fiscal sponsorship is a way for individuals to launch and test new ideas without having to obtain tax-exempt status or build a full-fledged organization. The fiscal sponsor not only helps to provide administrative services and oversight but also assumes some or all of the legal and financial responsibility for the activities of the nonprofit entrepreneur.

Benefits, Costs, and Types of Fiscal Sponsorship

From a theoretical perspective, fiscal sponsors help establish the stabilizing conditions essential for emerging nonprofits to evolve. However, fiscal sponsorship is not just beneficial to the emerging entity but is also viewed as having broader and more long-term advantages. As noted by Jonathan Spack, ". . . fiscal sponsorships can be a real boon to the fluidity, innovative capacity, and diversity of the community-development and nonprofit sector."[8] Moreover, due to the concerted nature of fiscal sponsorship, it can serve as a valuable collaborative learning mechanism among nonprofits, and potentially as a mechanism to pool and coordinate scarce resources in a more efficient manner. Still, using a fiscal sponsor is not without cost. For example, many fiscal sponsors expect to be compensated financially for their services. Also, although the nonprofit entrepreneur may be officially in charge, he or she never retains full autonomy and agency of the program/project as long as the relationship with the fiscal sponsor remains. In addition, being a fiscal sponsor generates transaction as well as administrative costs, and depending on how many new and emerging entities are being housed by the sponsor, the demand for attention and support could potentially become a distraction and perhaps even induce mission creep.

The notion of fiscal sponsorship does not refer to a single mechanism; instead, it entails a number of relationship options that can exist between the nonprofit entrepreneur and the sponsor organization. Perhaps the most coherent—and commonly used—depiction and explanation of the

various fiscal sponsorship options can be found in the work of Greg Colvin, who differentiates among six fiscal sponsorship models.[9] As noted by Colvin, although each model has certain specific characteristics, they are not mutually exclusive. In other words, the different models can be combined into various hybrid types and/or serve as the basis for alternative models. Some of the key distinguishing features among the different models include the degree of financial independence enjoyed by the nonprofit entrepreneur, to what extent the activity of the nonprofit entrepreneur is a separate legal entity, the liability of the fiscal sponsor to third-party stakeholders, and how and where the economic transactions between the sponsor and nonprofit entrepreneur are reported. It is important to note that the regulations guiding fiscal sponsorship require mission alignment, and this, in the long run, may be a very wise first screen to use when looking for a fiscal sponsor.

We now briefly outline the different models, based on a summary provided by Colvin:

- The first model is labeled *direct projects*, and reflects situations in which fiscal sponsors fully integrate the nonprofit entrepreneur's activity into the program portfolio of the sponsoring organization. In other words, the fiscal sponsor has maximum control of the activity, and the sponsor and the nonprofit entrepreneur have an employer–employee relationship. As noted by Colvin, the direct project is likely the most frequent model for fiscal sponsorship but also one with a potential for tension and conflict, as the nonprofit entrepreneur does not have legal control of the activity should he or she decide (for example) to launch his or her own independent nonprofit.

- The second model is labeled *independent contractor projects*, which changes the relationship between the sponsor and the nonprofit entrepreneur from an employer–employee relationship to a project–contract relationship. In this scenario, the activity still has its principal home in the sponsor organization, but the undertaking of the activity is contracted out to the nonprofit entrepreneur. Colvin comments that this arrangement still allows the

The notion of fiscal sponsorship does not refer to a single mechanism; instead, it entails a number of relationship options that can exist between the nonprofit entrepreneur and the sponsor organization.

fiscal sponsor to have certain control over the project's results.

- The third model is the *preapproved grant* model, where the fiscal sponsor accepts and transfers external funding to the nonprofit entrepreneur as such funds are obtained. This can involve, for example, a one-time grant from a foundation or continuous transfers from multiple donors.

- The final three models—*group exemption*, *supporting organization*, and *technical assistance*—all involve relationships in which the nonprofit entrepreneur has obtained 501(c)(3) tax status for his or her activity. For the group exemption and supporting organization, the nonprofit entrepreneur can directly solicit and obtain donations from external funders, and gains a tax benefit from being in a relationship with the fiscal sponsor. In the final model, the relationship is focused on the fiscal sponsor providing financial and administrative technical assistance—for example, filing tax returns or bookkeeping.[10]

The Fiscal Sponsor Landscape

When we decided to investigate the basic questions of *who* and *how* with regard to fiscal sponsorship, we were surprised to find that fiscal sponsors have so far received very little attention from the nonprofit research community.

As noted by Spack, "Because fiscal sponsorship is by definition a behind-the-scenes service, it is often under the public and philanthropic radar."[11] There is certainly some awareness of fiscal sponsorship in the research community. For example, Kirsten Grønbjerg, Helen Liu, and Thomas Pollak highlight how fiscal sponsors are one source contributing to the "dark matter" of non-IRS-registered nonprofit entities.[12] Joanne Carman describes the promise of community foundations as fiscal sponsors for community development.[13] And Nancy Kinney and Mary Carver discuss urban congregations as potential—if limited—incubators of emerging new service organizations.[14] However, no research has directly addressed the characteristics of fiscal sponsor organizations—which in turn has likely contributed to the impression that although fiscal sponsors exist, currently operate, and thus have an impact on the nonprofit sector, they are not well recognized or understood.

The most determined attempt to get a grasp on organizations serving as fiscal sponsors is a report commissioned by the Tides Center, based on a survey of 111 fiscal sponsors identified via Internet search engines.[15] The report does provide some basic information, but the key purpose of the survey was to gather data on the types of practices and the key challenges facing fiscal sponsor organizations. The report finds that the policies and practices employed by fiscal sponsors vary significantly, and that there is no distinctive type of fiscal sponsor. Furthermore, ". . . there is a growing number of organizations involved in fiscal sponsorship with increasing project loads."[16] Given the scarcity of empirical research focusing on fiscal sponsors, we sought to provide a first glance at the fiscal sponsor industry and answer a number of basic yet important questions, including: What typifies nonprofit organizations serving as fiscal sponsors? How many projects do they sponsor, what types of projects do they sponsor, and what types of support do they offer to the nonprofit entrepreneur? What does the fiscal sponsor receive in return, if anything, for its services?

To answer these questions, we accessed a sample of fiscal sponsors identified in the Fiscal Sponsor Directory.[17] The Fiscal Sponsor Directory is produced and maintained by San Francisco Study Center Inc., and contains more than two hundred fiscal sponsors. Our sample begins with two hundred and eighteen fiscal sponsors with identification information. We then merged this list with the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) CORE 2013 File and CORE 2013 Full File, resulting in a final sample of 184 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsors with financial data.

Table 1 shows what types of nonprofit organizations serve as fiscal sponsors. The largest sector represented by our sample—arts, culture, humanities—makes up 34 percent of the total sample. Philanthropy, voluntarism, grantmaking makes up 16 percent of the sample. Community improvement, capacity building makes up 9 percent of the sample. The remaining 41 percent

Table 1
Nonprofits Serving as Fiscal Sponsors by NTEE Type

Industry	Number of Organizations	% Sample
Arts, Culture, Humanities	63	34.24%
Educational Institutions	8	4.35%
Environmental Quality Protection, Beautification	15	8.15%
Health—General, Rehabilitative	5	2.72%
Mental Health, Crisis Intervention	2	1.09%
Disease, Disorders, Medical Disciplines	3	1.63%
Medical Research	1	0.54%
Crime, Legal Related	6	3.26%
Agriculture, Food, Nutrition	1	0.54%
Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness and Relief	1	0.54%
Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics	5	2.72%
Youth Development	5	2.72%
Human Services	8	4.35%
International, Foreign Affairs, National Security	5	2.72%
Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy	4	2.17%
Community Improvement, Capacity Building	17	9.24%
Philanthropy, Voluntarism, Grantmaking	29	15.76%
Science and Technology Research Institutes	1	0.54%
Social Science Research Institutes	1	0.54%
Public, Society Benefit	1	0.54%
Religion, Spiritual Development	3	1.63%
Total	184	100%

of the sample is disbursed across eighteen major groups in the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE). In all, the sample is sector diverse, with twenty-one of twenty-six NTEE Core Codes (NTEE-CC) represented.

In terms of geographic dispersion, 38 percent of the sample is located in California, while 14 percent of the sample is located in New York. California and New York combine for more than half the sample. The remaining portion of the sample is scattered across twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia. In all, the sample is geographically diverse, with the majority of states represented. Financial characteristics of the sample reveal that fiscal sponsors tend to be medium- to large-sized organizations. The mean total revenues were approximately $11 million (the median approximately $1 million) and mean total expenses are close to $10 million (the median $930,000). Organizations serving as fiscal sponsors receive the majority of their revenue in contributions and engage in multiple sponsored projects. The average fiscal sponsor was involved with fifty-eight projects and the median was sixteen projects, with a roughly even split between charging a fixed fee for service (48 percent of the sample) and having a scaled fee structure (49 percent of the sample), with the remaining 3 percent of the sample not charging a fee or not disclosing a fee structure.

In addressing what types of projects they sponsor and what types of support they offer to the nonprofit entrepreneur, we reviewed eligibility criteria used by the fiscal sponsor as well as projects they are willing to sponsor and services offered to the projects.

Ninety percent of the sample report having an aligned mission and aligned values as criteria for fiscally sponsoring a project. Just over half of fiscal sponsors cite geographic location as a criterion. Interestingly, type of service, having an advisory group, and minimum budget size are cited as criteria by less than 30 percent. Comparing eligibility criteria by the size of fiscal sponsor, the largest quartile of fiscal sponsors are less likely to have geographic restrictions and more likely to require the sponsored organization to have an advisory group. Conversely, the smallest quartile of fiscal sponsors are less likely to have

In addressing what types of projects they sponsor and what types of support they offer to the nonprofit entrepreneur, we reviewed eligibility criteria used by the fiscal sponsor as well as projects they are willing to sponsor and services offered to the projects.

a minimum budget requirement and more likely to restrict eligibility to specific services. Overall, it appears that most fiscal sponsors have flexible eligibility requirements, assuming that core mission and values align and that the project is geographically close. Fiscal sponsors were most willing to take on projects relating to arts and culture (68 percent), followed by education projects (55 percent), and children, youth, and families projects (53 percent). In comparing size quartiles, it becomes clear that the largest quartile of fiscal sponsors is more willing to sponsor projects across most (eighteen of twenty) project types. Interestingly, for two project types (arts and culture, and festivals and events), the smallest quartile of fiscal sponsors expressed the most willingness to sponsor projects. Overall, sponsors appear willing to take on a variety of projects (nineteen project areas were cited.)

Although the types of projects fiscal sponsors are willing to take on are diverse, the services they provide to projects cluster around financial services. Table 2 details the services offered by fiscal sponsors.

Bill paying (70 percent) and bookkeeping/accounting (70 percent) are cited as the top two most-often-provided services. Tax reporting (52 percent) is also cited more than 50 percent of the time. In reviewing the services offered, five of the top ten (auditing, bill paying, bookkeeping/accounting, payroll, and tax reporting) are accounting-related services, consistent with the notion that a primary function of fiscal sponsors is to provide these to projects. Perhaps not surprisingly, the largest fiscal sponsors are more likely to offer the greatest range of services to projects.

Conclusion and Implications

Overall, we identify the following takeaways with implications for the nonprofit sector:

- Voluntary groups need not incorporate to test whether or not they have the mission, vision, and followers to warrant a corporate structure of their own.
- Fiscal sponsors do not follow a standardized model, so it becomes important to do due diligence to compare and contrast what

Table 2 Services Offered to the Projects (N = 184)						
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	1st Quartile	2nd Quartile	3rd Quartile	4th Quartile
Auditing	38.59%	48.81%	65.22%	34.78%	23.91%	30.43%
Bill Paying	70.11%	45.90%	86.96%	65.22%	67.39%	60.87%
Bookkeeping/Accounting	69.57%	46.14%	82.61%	67.39%	60.87%	67.39%
Computer IT	18.48%	38.92%	32.61%	13.04%	8.70%	19.57%
Human Resource Management	29.35%	45.66%	54.35%	30.43%	15.22%	17.39%
Insurance	38.04%	48.68%	54.35%	39.13%	23.91%	34.78%
Legal Services	18.48%	38.92%	39.13%	15.22%	8.70%	10.87%
Office Space	17.93%	38.47%	23.91%	17.39%	17.39%	13.04%
Organizational Development	48.37%	50.11%	54.35%	50.00%	52.17%	36.96%
Payroll	37.50%	48.54%	63.04%	36.96%	19.57%	30.43%
Receiving Property and Stock Donations	47.28%	50.06%	60.87%	43.48%	45.65%	39.13%
Tax Reporting	51.63%	50.11%	65.22%	50.00%	43.48%	47.83%
Other	45.11%	49.90%	50.00%	52.17%	36.96%	41.30%

The Nonprofit Quarterly (NPQ): If fiscal sponsorship is the answer, what is the question?

Dan Neely and Fredrik Andersson: A frequent complaint coming from the nonprofit community—funders in particular—is that there are too many new nonprofits. Notwithstanding the merit or lack thereof of this claim, should an eager budding nonprofit entrepreneur always and swiftly obtain 501(c)(3) status for his or her nonprofit venture? While fiscal sponsorship does not offer a definitive answer, it illuminates a viable and valuable option. The problem is not too many new nonprofit ideas; the problem is how to carry them forward in a way that increases the chance for new ideas to take root and transform into innovations that add real value.

NPQ: Can you talk a bit about what might disqualify an organization from being a fiscal sponsor?

Neely and Andersson: Not being legal scholars, we are not in a position to say anything about what might legally disqualify an organization from being a fiscal sponsor. That said, taking on the responsibility of being a fiscal sponsor is not something that an organization should do haphazardly. First, when making the decision to serve as a fiscal sponsor, consider the opportunity costs. If you are going to devote capacity toward helping fledgling nonprofits, you are going to be forgoing capacity that could be used elsewhere. Ask yourself what, if anything, you are expecting to get out of taking on the role of fiscal sponsor. If the answer is "I don't know," then perhaps fiscal sponsorship is not for you and your organization. Even if the answer is "Nothing," remember that you are not the only one who gets to make the call regarding what is best for your organization. If external stakeholders view your attempt to serve as fiscal sponsor as unrelated to your organization's mission or as unwarranted, you can certainly do some harm to the reputation or brand of your organization. Again, this is not to say an organization should not become a fiscal sponsor—but it is advisable to make sure that there is at least some basic alignment and understanding among your key stakeholders that this is a path worth pursuing.

NPQ: Can you be too big or too small, or too old or too young, for fiscal sponsorship?

Neely and Andersson: The humdrum answer is "It depends." If one goal of fiscal sponsorship is to provide capacity to fledgling nonprofit entrepreneurs, then possessing such capacity ought to be a key criterion for deciding to become a fiscal sponsor. Whether you are big, small, young, or old are variables likely to impact what type of capacity can be offered, but this does not necessarily mean being young and/or small puts you on the sideline as a potentially excellent fiscal sponsor. Fiscal sponsors are represented by a range of ages and sizes. Indeed, one size does not fit all for organizations wishing to become fiscal sponsors.

"Ask yourself what, if anything, you are expecting to get out of taking on the role of fiscal sponsor. If the answer is 'I don't know,' then perhaps fiscal sponsorship is not for you and your organization."

one sponsor versus another might offer and at what cost, level of convenience, risk, and match to your group's need.

- Having a fiscal sponsor may buffer you from many of the administrative demands of being a start-up, but it likely will not address any of the larger entrepreneurial concerns of mission and vision development, strategy, recruitment, and momentum. On the other hand, it does leave you more time for such core concerns, if all goes well.

- The fiscal sponsor model is not just a viable model for nascent nonprofits. Organizations at any stage of maturity could benefit from such an umbrella function. Indeed, organizations might find that the most efficient use of resources is to engage a fiscal sponsor for the duration of their existence.

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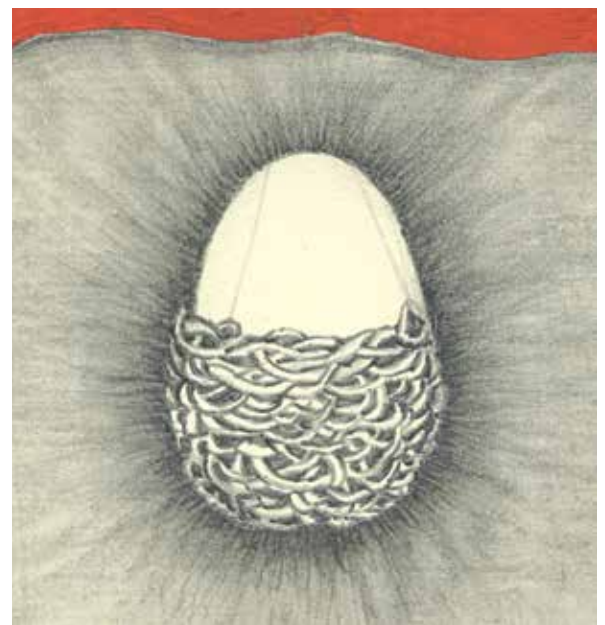
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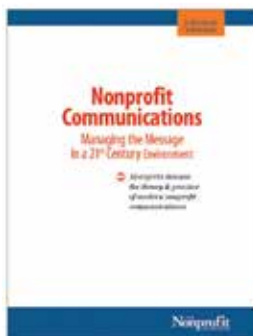
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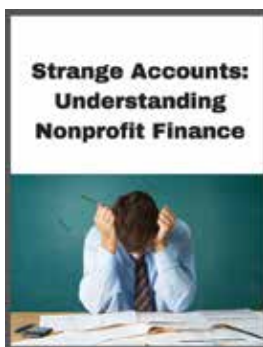
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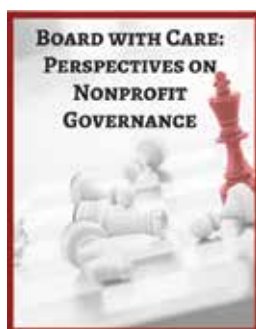
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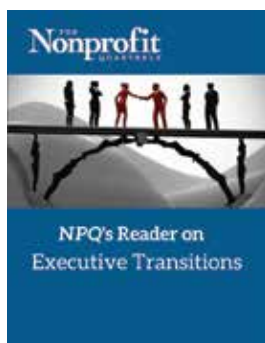
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You First: Leadership for a New World

by Mark Light, MBA, PhD

Closed systems may feel safe and warm, but don't be fooled: all closed systems eventually die. Light's advice to leaders? "Stay open: open to new ideas, open to learning from the best, open to open borders. Do not close yourself off from ideas better than your own."

Editors' note: Good leadership requires moments of reflection in which we think about the dynamics at play in the systems we seek to change. This new column by Mark Light addresses the lens shifting that we must do in those moments in order to be effective over time.
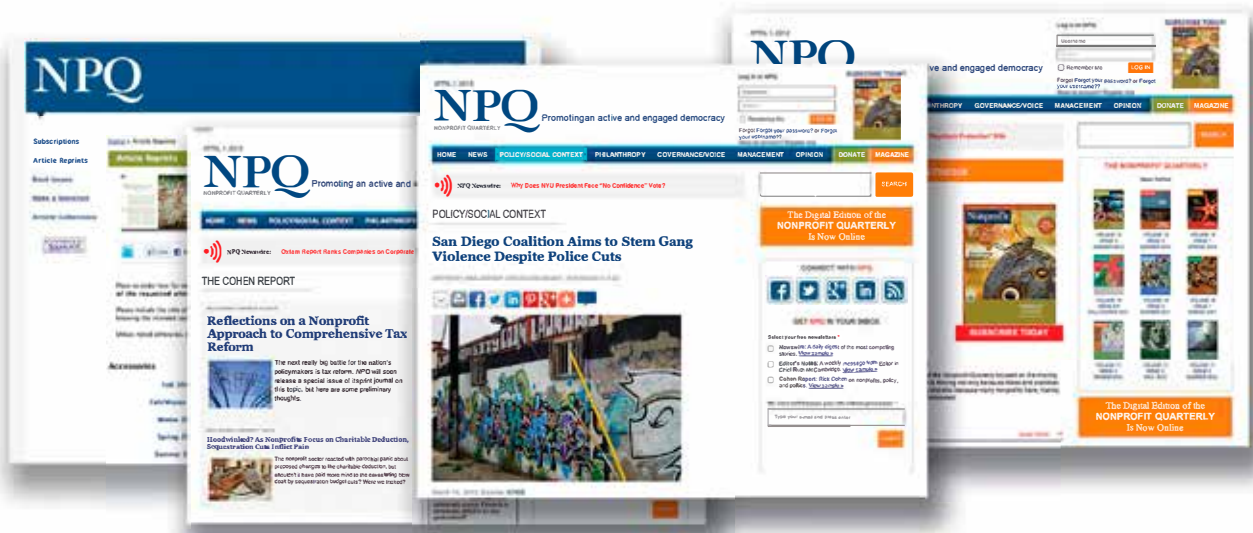
MY WIFE ONCE GAVE ME A marvelous gift. It was a sealed glass ecosphere about ten inches high and filled with water, tiny brine shrimp, and algae. Very elegant—a real conversation piece. The ecosphere is also the perfect pet; all you have to do is watch the dozen or so shrimp swim around. You never have to feed them, because the sphere is a sealed, self-contained world: The algae produce oxygen; the shrimp consume the oxygen and the algae; bacteria clean up after the shrimp, breaking the waste down into nutrients; algae feed off the nutrients and light energy in order to replenish; and so on. Just add some low light, and you're good to go.

> To reassure the local groups about the center's intentions, I would bring out my little glass ecosphere to make my point that we were all in it together.

About the same time that I received my ecosphere, I was serving as the president of Dayton, Ohio's Arts Center Foundation, where we were building the $130 million Schuster Performing Arts Center. I spent a lot of time in meetings with arts leaders whose agencies would eventually perform in the new center. These folks were thrilled with the project but worried about whether the center was going to bring in big-name national and international artists who would compete with the local arts groups.

Our agency's philosophy at the time was "do no harm." We subsidized the rents and provided ticketing services and other benefits. To reassure the local groups about the center's intentions, I

would bring out my little glass ecosphere to make my point that we were all in it together. "Our local arts groups," I would say, "are a delicate ecosystem that needs to be carefully nurtured." So, we would forgo opportunities like presenting the Cleveland Orchestra.

One day, a few years after opening the new center, I was shocked to notice that all the shrimp were dead. I called the manufacturer of my ecosystem and found out that this was completely natural—the inevitable result of a closed system, where there are no matter exchanges with the outside. I also discovered that these ecospheres are not so good for the social life of the shrimp, and their popularity are threatening the shrimp population in Hawaii. And, horrifyingly, the shrimp are in fact dying a slow death over the course of their two-or-so years of existence in the ecosphere, due to

semi-starvation, lack of proper oxygen, and micro amounts of toxic waste. This species of shrimp, it turns out, can live up to twenty years in a more favorable environment.

Bottom line is that closed systems like my ecosphere will eventually run out of energy and die. In its quest for preservation and protection of its boundaries, the closed system exhausts all of its resources and collapses. Open systems, on the other hand, get energy from their interactions with the outside world. Closed and open systems are very much like monopolies and open markets. In monopoly environments, things can go to hell in a handbasket because there's no incentive to make the improvements and innovations that come naturally with open systems. In open systems, competition keeps everyone on their toes; it's a good thing, because it keeps the system fresh and excited, and always responsive.

What had I done by encouraging a closed system?! When it comes to the arts, we should absolutely treasure our local talents. Heaven only knows what we'd do without them. But a dose of Chicago Shakespeare Theater every once in a while is hardly a threat. In fact, it may be the very lifeblood that we need to keep from becoming anemic.

Fast-forward to the present: The Schuster Center is still a centerpiece of downtown; Broadway shows continue to come to town, but generally play fewer performances; there was a merger of the Dayton Opera, Dayton Ballet, and Dayton Philharmonic back in 2012; and a couple of agencies exited the stage, including an annual folk festival. Overall, and thanks in part to a very generous bequest, the arts in Dayton and the Schuster Center are still moving along, give or take. According to IRS 990s, Culture Works—the united arts fund

in Dayton—showed revenues of about $1.7 million in its 2003 filing (when the Schuster Center opened) and $852 thousand in 2016. The Dayton Art Institute had $4.9 million in 2003 and $5.8 million in 2015; and the Victoria Theatre Association reported $13.3 million in 2003 and $13.8 million in 2015.

If you were on the edge of your seat waiting for a dramatic end to the story, be prepared for disappointment. It takes years for the results of any system to fully manifest. Closed systems don't collapse apocalyptically, and open systems don't make it to the stars overnight. Amazon's rise to prominence took eighteen years.

What's a leader to do? Stay open: open to new ideas, open to learning from the best, open to open borders. Do not close yourself off from ideas better than your own. Do not be afraid to have others (clients, audiences, customers, employees, board members, etc.) join you in this journey to being the best that you can be.

In the 1996 documentary *Triumph of the Nerds*, Steve Jobs summed up Apple's success with the Macintosh computer: "It comes down to trying to expose yourself to the best things that humans have done and then try to bring those things into what you're doing." You can't do this in a closed system. Based upon the ecosphere, I will always bet on the open system. But don't take my word for it: talk to the shrimp. Oh, wait—they're dead.

MARK LIGHT, MBA, PhD, is founder and president of First Light Group (www.firstlightgroup.com), with a mission to bring your future within reach through leadership coaching, emerging leaders programs, teaching and training, and writing.

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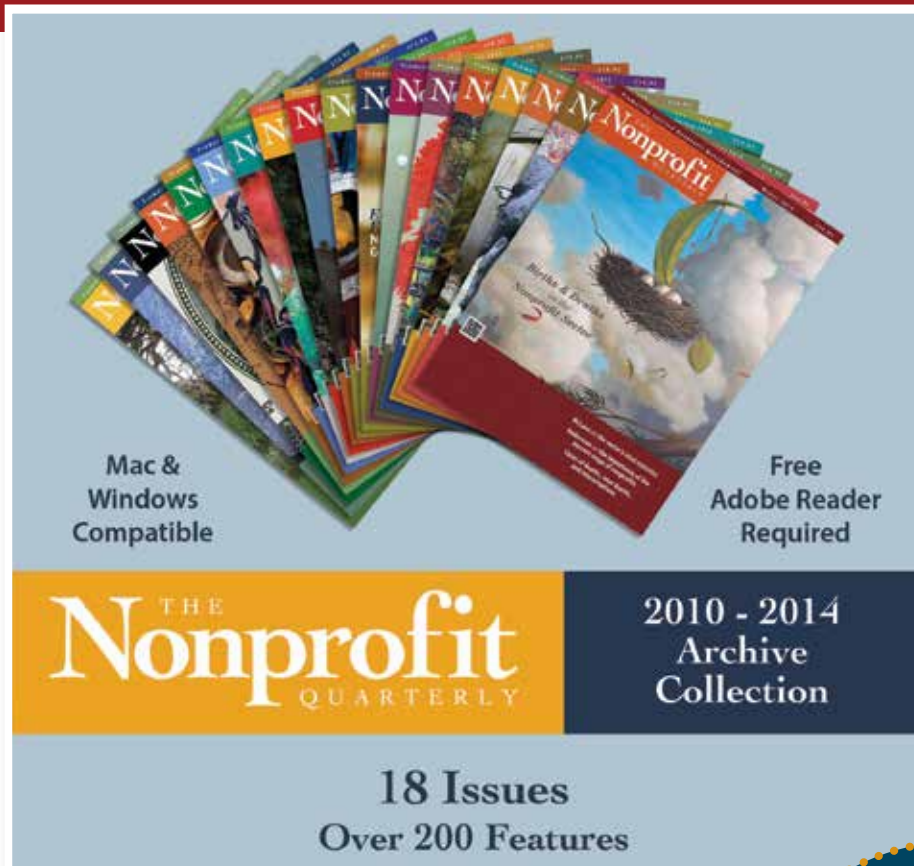And the world can't afford for that to happen.

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