

Evaluation of Community Leadership Programs in Balochistan

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Abstract

Community leadership programs represent a mechanism for the development of leadership skills and concepts. This research study measured the impact of seven community leadership programs on participants' leadership skills and their respective communities. Before and after assessments, direct interviews, and focus group interviews were used to collect data. The participants has significantly increased their leadership skills and reported the most common benefits were: increased community networking; improved ability to interact with people; and increased understanding of civic responsibility. Recommendations for leadership programs include producing curriculum application of leadership skills in addition to community awareness; additional programming for alumni; designing a two phase program; and conducting educational workshops for program directors.

Keywords: Community leadership programs, leadership skills, community awareness, Pre and post assessments, understanding of civic responsibility

Introduction

Community Leadership Programs promote and encourage outstanding community leadership, by developing the leadership capabilities of citizens who care about the community, who understand its strengths and weaknesses, and who are willing to make a personal investment to improve a community's quality of life. The opportunity for community foundations to be community leadership organizations has never been more apparent; the need for our community leadership abilities has never been more profound. The challenges our communities face are deep. Community leadership is about councils, both councilors and officers, enabling local communities to steer their own future. It is not traditional, top-down leadership, but involves councilors and officers using all the tools at their disposal to engage communities in making their own difference. It promotes a partnership of shared commitment to promote a shared vision for the locality.

Leadership is not an innate characteristic, and can be developed through formal and informal training (Bolton, 1991). Leadership can also be developed through properly designed leadership projects. An impact assessment of the public affairs leadership programs in California, Michigan, Montana, and Pennsylvania concluded that leadership programs make a difference in the lives of participants (Howell, Weir & Cook, 1979). Community leadership development programs in Balochistan district have existed for several years with more added each year. In particular, local government community leadership programs from Jan 2007 to Dec 2010 assists Balochistan province in developing and teaching community leadership programs. However, the impact of community leadership programs upon the participants and the communities within Balochistan has not been appropriately documented.

Councilors are in key positions to make things happen but need both the skills and motivation to succeed. Councilors will face a real challenge in balancing the various elements of their community leadership role. In particular, they will need to think carefully about the meaning of leadership. Leadership in this context does not mean taking centre stage – it is about creating the right environment for others to act. It is less directing and controlling, more stimulating, enabling and empowering. Councilors will need to develop the requisite skills and capacity to do this effectively. Community leadership includes more than the services and functions delivered by the local council. The focus of community leadership has to be the whole gamut of public services delivered locally together with the contribution and impact of the private, voluntary and community sectors. It is not just about the council's vision for the locality, it has to be framed around a shared vision – and backed up by a shared commitment to delivering and supporting the implementation of that vision. This really is about partnership working

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify potential impacts of community leadership development programs on program participants' leadership skills. The specific objective of the study was to assess the impact of each community leadership program on the leadership skills acquired by program participants.

Review of Literature

Many community leadership programs exist across the country. Community leadership programs from Balochistan including locations Quetta, Loralie, Zhob, Turbat and Kharan.. Although the programs differed in format and length, and were geared specifically to a particular community, similar outcomes have been reported. The most often cited benefit of community leadership programming was increased citizen involvement/volunteer activity (Ghulam , 1982; Kamal, Ali & Qurban, 1987; Kaship & Khurram, 2009; Leadership Tomorrow Evaluation Committee, 1991; Waheed, 1981). Another frequently reported benefit included increased leadership skills (Rohs & Langone, 1993; Whent & Leising, 1992; Seeley, 1981; Waheed). Increased confidence was reported by Rohs and Langone, Kimball et al., and Waheed..

Additionally, increased networking among participants and/or community groups was reported by Langone and Rohs (1992), Kincaid and Knop (1992), Whent and Leising (1992), and the Leadership Tomorrow Evaluation Committee (1991). A broadened or different perspective was reported by Langone and Rohs, Whent and Leising, and the Leadership Tomorrow Evaluation Committee, whereas education on community issues was found by Rohs and Langone (1993), Whent and Leising, the Leadership Tomorrow Evaluation Committee, and Kimball et al., (1987).

Although increased leadership skills were found by four studies, the Leadership Tomorrow Evaluation Committee (1991) and Kamal et al., (1987) reported no significant increase in these skills, taking on a new leadership role was reported in studies by Rohs and Langone (1993), and Ghulam (1982), whereas Khurram et al., found no change in leadership roles. Increased listening/communication skills were reported by Ghulam and Seeley (1981) and a shift in community organization activity to those organizations that have more impact on the community was reported by Khurram et al., and Waheed (1981).

Methods

This descriptive exploratory study was initiated in Dec 2010. Community leadership programs included in the study must have been supported by local union in the planning or teaching of at least 50% of their leadership programs during the 2007-10 program years. A total of seven local union programs met this criterion. Participants for this study consisted of a census of 67 program participants, a purposeful sample of 36 program alumni, and a census of the seven program directors. Kouzes' and Posner's (2003) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was used as pre- and post assessments for program participants. The response rate was 85.1% (57 participants completed the program, five participants did not complete their program and five participants had incomplete data).

In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with the seven program directors and focus group interviews were conducted with six of the 2003-06 community leadership program alumni groups by local government. The main purpose of the director interviews and focus group interviews was to gather overall impressions about their respective leadership programs. Quantitative data from the Leadership Practices Inventory were analyzed utilizing SPSS for Windows 6.0. Program director and focus group interviews were analyzed using Ethnograph, a qualitative software computer program.

Results and Findings

Table 1 displays pre- and post-test mean scores for the Leadership Practices Inventory. T-tests for dependent groups were used to make sure differences were not due to chance. Program participants significantly increased ($p < .01$) their leadership skills in each area of the Leadership Practices Inventory.

Table 1			
Paired t-Tests for Leadership Practices Inventory (n = 57)			
Variable	Mean	sd.	p
Challenging the Process			
Pre-Test	3.48	.59	<.01
Post Test	3.80	.53	
Inspiring a Shared Vision			
Pre-Test	3.16	.68	<.01
Post Test	3.51	.59	
Enabling Others to Act			
Pre-Test	3.84	.44	<.01
Post Test	4.15	.41	
Modeling the Way			
Pre-Test	3.40	.49	<.01
Post Test	3.80	.46	
Encouraging the Heart			
Pre-Test	3.74	.69	<.01
Post Test	3.99	.65	

General themes of personal and community benefits, benefits attributed to local government project, and program improvement suggestions were identified from the qualitative analyses. Benefits identified by program directors included community awareness, understanding and interacting with others, an increased sense of teamwork, development of local leaders, implementation of community projects, availability of quality instructors for reasonable fees, and increased networking. Program directors felt local programs could be improved by addressing less topics per day, holding class sessions only during the fall, winter, and spring months, increasing sponsorship by local businesses and agencies, and keeping alumni actively involved with future classes.

Benefits identified by alumni included improved personal communication skills, personal networking within the community, community awareness, increased self-confidence, motivation and risk taking, understanding and interacting with others, a broadened perspective on many issues, improved teamwork, and improved problem solving abilities. Alumni felt that gaining insight as to how government officials and agencies interrelate was an additional benefit. Program improvements identified by alumni included wanting to spend more time applying leadership skills (experiential learning) than just learning academic theory, needing a class project to practice leadership skills learned, reducing the amount of content and allowing more time for class discussion, improving recruitment efforts for future classes, and increasing community awareness of the leadership program.

Conclusions

Differences in the pre- and post-assessments indicated that the participants improved their leadership skills and practices as a result of participating in the respective community leadership programs. Participants (a) were more willing to challenge the status quo and take risks; (b) broadened and changed their perspective of leadership roles/responsibilities within the community and were encouraging others to accept some leadership responsibility; (c) developed a greater appreciation for teamwork and collaboration within their community and improved their problem solving skills; and (d) learned to adapt their leadership styles to fit different contexts within the community.

Through the face-to-face and focus group interviews, perceptual insights were gained on how community leadership programs contributed to participants' personal and professional lives and to the community. Alumni were highly complimentary of their respective leadership programs. The most common benefits reported by alumni were: (a) increased networking within the community; (b) developed a greater understanding and ability to interact with people; (c) increased self-confidence and the personal motivation to become actively involved in community affairs; and (d) developed an understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of their leadership responsibility as a citizen.

Program directors and alumni identified several recommendations to improve the quality of the leadership programs. Programmatically, suggestions were to: (a) include additional topics such as grantsmanship, customer relations, boardmanship, economic development, reinventing government, and public speaking; (b) allow the class participants to develop their program agendas and goals in collaboration with program directors to make the program more learner centered; (c) reduce the amount of content per program day to allow the participants more time for discussion, reflection, and to see the relevance of the concepts being taught; (d) develop workshops, seminars, discussion groups, and other means of making leadership development a life long learning process; and (e) continue to promote the community leadership program within the community and secure additional funds from corporate and local sponsors.

Recommendations

Community leadership programs should incorporate curriculum application of leadership skills in addition to leadership awareness. Allocating more time for hands-on practical learning experiences would enhance community leadership programs. As suggested by alumni, assigning a class group project would help participants apply the leadership skills learned throughout the program. Advanced educational programming should be made available for those alumni wanting to pursue a more in-depth study of leadership. A needs assessment should be conducted with alumni of community leadership programs to determine what topics should be addressed in subsequent workshops.

More in depth study to develop an individual's leadership behaviors and actions should be incorporated into the programs and less time should be spent on community awareness. Community leadership programs should be designed in two phases. The first phase should be designed for the development of participant's leadership behaviors and actions, and to learn about community issues. The second phase should incorporate the application of the behaviors and actions through a class project. Annual educational workshops should be provided for program directors on adult education training techniques. These workshops would allow program directors to enhance their teaching skills and develop additional capacities for future programming efforts.

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