

DataCenter:

Sharing Leadership in Our Organizations

*Reflections from the First Wednesdays Series,
Supported by LLC Community Seed Fund*

October 21, 2009 Hosted by LLC



DataCenter

Impact research for social justice

Conflicting Realities: Negative Power

power: n. 1. one's ability to screw you up; 2. the malicious force from which you must guard and protect yourself.

Conflicting Realities: Negative Power

| Executive/Senior/ White/Straight Male/College Educated | Program/Younger/POC /Gay/Female/No College Education | Symptoms |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Free reign of political upperhand: Institutional, executive power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unilateral, lack input/buy-in of subordinates. ● Unaware/unconcerned re: consequence of decision to subordinates. | <p>Free reign of moral high ground: Obstructive; subversive; passive power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 'Boss' as Enemy vs. 'Staff' as the righteous 'underdogs' ● Undermine 'boss' in subtle & blatant ways. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lack of trust; ● question intentions; ● Polarized tension ● secrecy ● Campaign/battle mode (us vs. them) ● Justice-oriented <p><u>Outcome:</u> compromise capacity for mission & public trust & resources.</p> |

Complementary Realities: Positive Power

power: n. 1. ability to make positive change happen; 2. ability to define and exercise leadership

Complementary Realities: Positive Power

| Executive/Senior/White/Straight Male/College Educated | Program/Younger/POC/Gay/Female/No College Education | Symptoms |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Support/mentorship/guidance; accountability. “power to be vulnerable”; practice “staff & org-mandated power”</p> | <p>Peer Accountability; peer support. Engage in strategy conversation as equals. Meet support needs of Exec; practice “delegating power”; giving ‘mandate’</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased trust leads to increased delegation of power & authority ● Common intentions are operating assumptions; ● Multi-directional tension embraced ● communication (transparency) ● 2 sides become 1. ● Forgiveness-oriented <p><u>Outcome:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practiced spirit of mutuality ● Org-wide buy-in to stewardship of public trust & resources. ● boost capacity for mission |

Leadership at DataCenter

***“We had no choice, BUT to take the boldest step possible...”
and that was our Shared Leadership Model.***

“Leadership” timeline:

- Mid-'90s: First management position created. Lasted a year.
- Late '90s: First “Executive Director” position created. Lasted 18 months.
- 2001-2004: Co-Directorship
- 2004-2005: Co-Directors succeed (external hires) – Both left within a year, with 100% turnover of the Board. Exec and up become vacant.
- 2005-2006: Interim ED (Patricia St. Onge): “So what now? What do YOU want?”
- 2006: Program staff launch Shared Leadership Model, occupy all organizational departments under this structure.

Goals of DataCenter's 'Shared Leadership Model' (rev. 2007)

- 1. ownership of org by staff and board**
- 2. a model that seeks to dismantle racism & systems of oppression**
- 3. develop long-term, sustainable leadership by people of color**
- 4. INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS AND CONSTITUENT GROUPS (original text was "constituency")**
- 5. *super*-modeling "walking the talk"**

'Shared Leadership Model'

- pay equity
- rotation of positions (staggered)
- value-based (articulate own values as foundation of org mission and how we fulfill it)
- program and admin integration
- leadership development
(professional/cultural/spiritual)

'Shared Leadership Model'

Plus:

1. “now I’m doing part bookkeeping, have compassion to its needs – can understand why they needed to ask me the money questions they did.” (by program staff commenting on less tension with admin)
2. “Program benefits from having fresh perspective; I can pilot trainings” (by admin staff who represents constituent community)
3. We can **all** understand budgeting & financial statements.
4. “didn’t realize before when I *didn’t* do something, how that impacted another person’s work.” (by everybody)

'Shared Leadership Model'

Thought we'd gotten it right this time!

But...

Retreat notes from '06:

1. Need to coordinate what/who/how needs to happen – but who?
2. “oh well, it’s just a job after all.” And checking out – disempowered from lack of ability/authority to act.
3. Accountability (& Personnel) – seen as ‘power-over’

'First Wednesdays' Series: April-June 2009

Hypotheses:

1. Most organizations are re-inventing the wheel – and feeling isolated. (or are we really alone?)
2. Resources & tools are hard to come by for anything but hierarchical org structure. (what else is out there?)
3. Vague notion that “strong ED” = stability – not necessarily ‘absolute truth.’ (or is it?)
4. Exec-Program drama (power-over dynamic) is structural. (but how exactly?)
5. Keys to better leadership live **among** us as well as in ‘professional’ sector; need right mix of methodologies to capture them. (reclaim experiential knowledge!)

Goals of the Series

1. To develop/strengthen key elements of institutional support necessary for sustainable leadership development in SLM
2. To propose appropriate systems and structures of a social justice non-profit organizations that support SLM

First Wednesdays Series: Methodologies

Source: the participants!

Tools: agenda/guides,
colored paper, tapes,
talkstory, surveymonkey

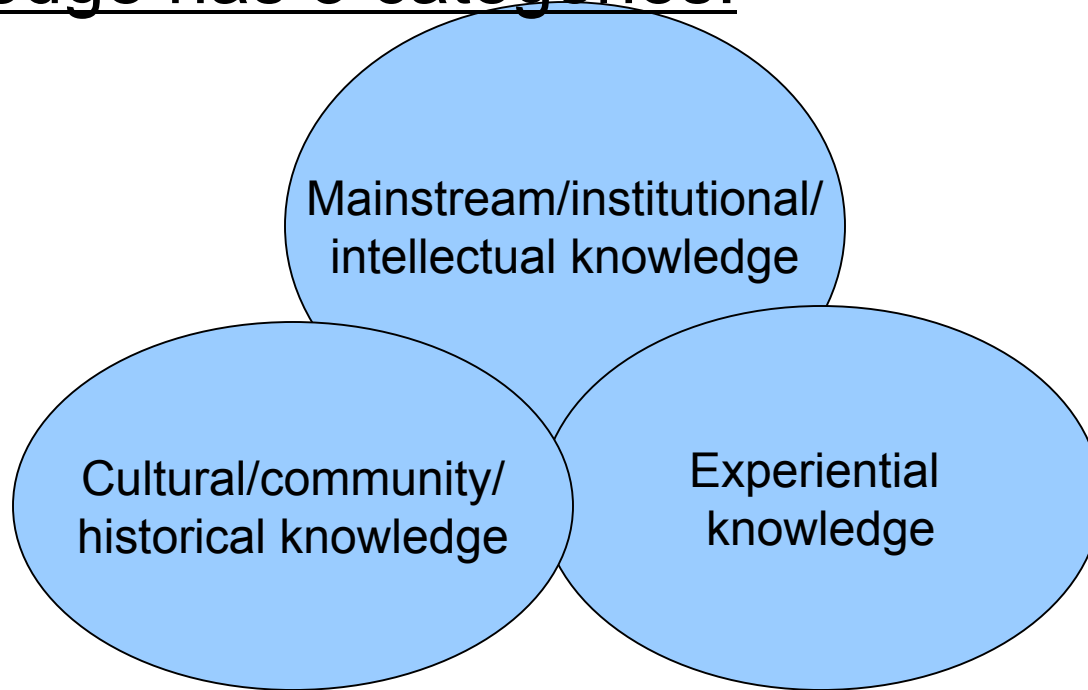


Methods: structured thematic discussion & large-
group synthesis; online questionnaire;
evaluation (plus/delta/takeaway)

Why participatory methods?

Extract → interpret → analyze → synthesize
→ 'knowledge'

Knowledge has 3 categories:



Demographics (from surveymonkey)

10 respondents out of 70 attendants.

- 9 out of 10 are formally affiliated with a non profit organization (501c3)
- Multi-generational interest (newbies & veterans alike)
 - 30% had been with 501c3 for 10-12 years.
 - 20% 15 years and up.
 - 20% 1-3 years.
 - 10% 4-6 years

Demographics (from surveymonkey)

Your top reasons for participating:

1. **Professional Development 60%**
2. **Troubleshooting (on the job/organization) 60%**
3. **Networking 20%**
4. **Other: A commitment to developing stronger people of color-led organizations 20%**

April 2009 Objectives

1. Explore different kinds of power and how they function in our organizations
2. Look at different styles of leadership and how they play out in our experiences
3. Generate shared vocabulary
4. Set shared foundation & framework for next conversations

May 2009 Objectives

1. What needs to be put into place in order to ensure
 1. **our values of leadership**
 2. **PEOPLE are proficient & equipped to wield positive power & leadership**
 3. **organizational & grassroots social justice movement needs are met?**

2. What are some of the challenges, and 'alignment' needed to exist as a 501c3 in the world of
 - hierarchy,
 - assumed institutional authority figures, and
 - western notion of "*the hero*"?

June 2009 Objectives

1. Agree *WHY* support & accountability in the first place?
2. Develop a *common conceptual framework of support & accountability*
3. Name/Anticipate common challenges to *value-based* personnel support & accountability

Reframing Challenges & Assumptions

Point 1 of 4:

From “They just don’t get it!” to “We have multiple realities here (and it’s ok)”

Excerpt from participant feedback: This means that we have to *not* see the situation as needing to fix “broken” things but rather, attempt to “redefine” what the reality/realities is/are, then to be able to say TOGETHER “what is this” – and get on same page.

From “They just don’t get it!” to “We have multiple realities here (and it’s ok)”

| Funders & donors want | Community partners want... |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The ‘go-to’ person who can be trusted with investment & be held accountable2. Western icon of ‘hero’-charismatic leader3. Full authority in leader4. ‘professional’ qualifications, stature & culture | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. ‘go-to’ person who can deliver on their word2. Someone who can talk to them in their own language3. Partners whose organizational (internal) practices reflect their mission and values |

But is it really that stakeholders want (only) conflicting things from the Organization’s Executive Leadership?

Reframing Challenges & Assumptions

Point 2 of 4:

From 'Support **vs.** Accountability' to
'Support **and** Accountability'

Excerpt from participant feedback: Accountability is an *intrinsic part of support*, rather than separate things, administered by different (and multiple) people or living in different departments

Reframing Challenges & Assumptions

Point 3 of 4:

From Ageism to Multigenerationalism

Excerpt from participant feedback: People and ideas are intergenerational. This is also key – each carries its own wisdom.

Reframing Challenges & Assumptions

Point 4 of 4:

From

‘Scientific & Intellectual’ to ‘Multi-disciplinary & Holistic’

Excerpt from participant feedback: Process is *not* a linear (and uni-directional) growth path, but rather, spiral. Repeat experiences and challenges -- but each time, grow and try different things, and in the process, increase capacity to be effective

So...Shared Leadership is ...

What do you think?

'Lessons' @ DataCenter

1. **Power/authority → responsibility → self-determination.**
2. **If 'blocking,' must present a feasible alternative**
3. **It's no longer "just a job" – fully own responsibility to call out own 'checkouts'**
4. **Must exercise power and authority (yes, over someone else)**
5. **Increased responsibility and accountability and scrutiny.**
6. **Interface with the public whose definition of "worthwhile work" "common sense" "valuable work" etc. may conflict with yours (and you have no control over them being applied to your valuation)**
7. **Define the organizational/institutional mandate on IRS & Secretary of State terms**
8. **Define the social justice mandate on your terms**
9. **Shared Leadership Model requires ongoing reflection & growth:**
 1. **The Organizational is Political;**
 2. **the Personal is Political, and**
 3. **the Spiritual is Political.**
10. **Therefore, it is a deeply personal – as well as professional – experience (for the better!).**

Reimagining...

1. “Investment” in Movement Building/
Institution Building, not just “program
delivery”

Investment in the following do matter!

1. Financial support
2. Staff time
3. Learning curve
4. Wisdom by predecessors, peers
5. Venues & infrastructure

Reimagining...

2. Productivity & Efficiency

- Producing what? Name. (real & ideal)
- Efficiency \leftrightarrow 'Investment' balance

Reimagining...

3. Leadership = not (just) ED

- Non-exec positions are key in exec's mission!
- Professional development (skills & tools)
- deconstructing & reconstructing power shifts power dynamics

Reimagining...

4. **Mistakes** as Learning Opportunities

1. Give mandate, then be (really) ready to pay consequence for flop. (“together, we will go on this test ride” spirit)
2. Notion of “nourish” – one needs a ‘home-base’ where flops are okay, and inform success.

Highlights from the Series' evaluation

- 9 out of 10 participants felt the overall quality and experience of the series was Good or Excellent (40% and 50% respectively)
- 8 out of 10 participants felt the program facilitation was Good or Excellent (40% in each)
- 9 out of 10 participants rated the discussion of the subject matter as Good or Excellent (60% and 30% respectively)
- There was not a single negative (Fair, Poor) rating for any of the statements under “overall experience.”

These rate the event series themselves, but also shine insight into overall **enthusiasm for venues around this topic.**

- 100% of the participants affirmed that the series successfully provided a venue of co-learning with other participants.

most valuable takeaway

- “hearing what other groups are doing” 70% agreed
Participants recognize the value of “experience” and experiential knowledge.
- Deepening knowledge & analysis 60% agreed
There is desire to learn on practical and philosophical levels
- Getting tools & resources 30% agreed
- Networking 30% agreed
- Getting peer advice 10% agreed

Importance of a local learning venue:

- 4 out of 5 participants agreed that Bay Area learning venue dedicated to leadership development in 501c3 that's based on shared leadership is FAIRLY or EXTREMELY important.

A Case for Support!

- 7 out of 10 participants agree, that support, resources and infrastructure for supporting leadership-sharing in social justice 501c3s are INSUFFICIENT.
- 100% said they would absolutely or likely participate in, or help convene, future series of the same topic.

-Let's do it again!

Thank you!



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