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Grassroots Leadership in Task-Oriented Groups: Learning from Successful Leaders

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ABSTRACT. This paper identifies patterns of successful grassroots leadership in task-oriented groups, drawing from the experiences of extraordinary leaders in nonprofit community organizations. Using qualitative research, the authors surveyed twenty-three leaders, considered to have extraordinary abilities by members of the governance boards and staffs of fifteen different community organizations in a northeastern U. S. state. The study examined the respondents' characteristics, attitudes, learning experiences, behavior, and interactive processes with other task group members. Data from the findings is organized along three basic lines of inquiry-paths to becoming a leader, leadership development processes, and action/interaction patterns. A number of common preferable factors for successful leadership are identified, including development of a joint vision, reciprocal relations with followers, and an emphasis on task group processes. The findings also demonstrate the need to integrate informal, experiential learning processes with formal institutional programs for leadership development. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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Grassroots leadership is recognized as a key component for promoting participation, democracy, and community empowerment, as well as for developing social change campaigns, projects and services in nonprofit community groups (Burghardt, 1982; Staples, 1984, 2004; Delgado, 1986; Rubin and Rubin, 1992; Zachary, 2000; Sen, 2003; Ephross and Vassal, 2004). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of literature examining the attributes, experiences and developmental processes that contribute most to successful leadership in grassroots groups.

The purpose of this study was to learn more about how successful grassroots leaders develop and carry out their responsibilities in task-oriented groups—the characteristics, attitudes, learning processes, and behaviors which contribute most to effective leadership in nonprofit community organizations through the eyes of experienced grassroots leaders. Surveying highly effective leaders is consistent with previous qualitative studies (Peters and Waterman, 1984; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Veltmeyer and Petras, 2002), which describe the behavior, interactions and processes associated with excellent leadership. However, most research has not focused on volunteer grassroots leadership in community groups, concentrating instead on paid managers, business leaders and political leaders. The present study was undertaken in order to provide a comprehensive picture of varied aspects of grassroots community leadership—paths to becoming a leader, processes of leadership development, action and interaction patterns with group members. By examining the motives, attitudes, roles and actions of successful grassroots leaders, the authors hope to contribute to the knowledge base for leadership training and development in community practice social work.

Grassroots leaders are unpaid volunteers who emerge from within the community and provide direction and guidance in specific or varied areas of its life. The leader might have a formal position (such as chair or member of committee), but she or he has similar status/standing relative to other community members, and has been identified by peers to lead a change effort (Boehm, 2002; Gildewell et al., 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two distinct approaches marked the early stages of leadership research. The initial studies on this topic employed the Trait Approach, based on the supposition that leaders have exceptional, innate traits through which they make an impact. Yet, hundreds of research studies on this subject were inconclusive and could provide no empirical evidence regarding the existence of traits clearly associated with leadership (Stogdill, 1974). The inadequacies of the Trait Approach led to the development of the Situational Approach, which explained leadership behavior in relation to different demands in various situations. However, this model failed to explain leaders' motivation, was overly reliant on lab research, and had problems associated with application (Heifetz, 1994).

An important development in leadership research—more appropriate to the present study, which also seeks to be applicable—sees leadership as a reciprocal relationship between leaders and the people whom they lead. In contrast to those approaches that emphasize the leader and the effectiveness of her or his actions, here the stress is on reciprocity: Where does the secret of the leader's strength lie? Why do people listen to this leader and follow her or his directions? For example, Rost (1991) defined leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes." (p. 11).

The concept of *influence*—frequently included in definitions of leadership—should be clarified so as not to confuse leadership with "rulership" (Burns, 1978). When a person complies with the demands of someone holding a position of authority (such as rulers, officials or managers), it is difficult to distinguish whether the former is acting out of free will or as a result of fear of the authoritative figure. Even though a leader's ability to influence and motivate people to act in a specified manner may be related to her or his formal authority, the Reciprocity Approach emphasizes the *mutual relations* developed between leaders and followers. Examination of this reciprocal relationship is appropriate for the present research conducted among grassroots leaders, who often do not enjoy the same degree of authority as formal managers who hold paid positions.

The Reciprocity Approach makes an important distinction between formal (official duties) and informal leadership (trust given by group members) as it impacts mutual relations (Gibb, 1969). The literature in community organization and leadership (Kahn, 1994; Tropman, 1997;

Zachary, 2000) has examined the basis of leaders' social power, and indicates that a variety of influence sources must be investigated, including social and political support, knowledge, reputation, legitimate power and the power of personality.

Leader-follower relations also are impacted by several other dynamics. First, they are affected by the degree to which leaders emphasize task accomplishment versus their concern with intra-group processes and members' feelings. Bales (1970) identified these two orientations—instrumental/task and socio-emotional/affective—as distinct forms of leadership and found that few leaders provided both types. However, there is a long-standing recognition that both task and process leadership is essential for grassroots community organizations to operate successfully (Hanson, 1972; Burghardt, 1979, 1982; Ephross and Vassil, 1988; Hardcastle et al, 1997; Johnson and Johnson, 2003). Finding the proper balance between the two remains a challenge for most community organizations and grassroots leaders.

A related but different dynamic entails the degree to which leaders make decisions democratically, developing strategies and tactics in consultation with their followers versus unilateral, autocratic decision-making. Leadership that involves group members through participatory processes, shared decision-making and delegation of responsibility is consistent with the empowerment literature, which stresses the need for community members to be actively engaged in the process of developing the requisite power to alter the conditions of their lives (Cox, 1991; Johnson et al, 1991; Breton, 1994; Arnold, 2000; Lee, 2001).

Additional literature on leadership deals with two basic levels of influence that exist in the mutual relations between leaders and their followers. One is based on a *transactional* model (Hollander, 1978), whereby the leader fulfills the expectations of her or his followers, and as compensation is willing to be influenced. A second model, *transformational* leadership, is based on emotional appeal and inspiration. Leadership of this sort inspires the people following to extend themselves beyond their normal capacities, sometimes even to the point of endangerment (Burns, 1978).

One feature, developed as a consequence of the transformational leadership approach, relates to the leader's ability to inspire and nurture a vision (Sashkin, 1988; Berson et al., 2001; Haslam and Platow, 2001). The vision incorporates a desirable picture of the future for the leader's group or community. Beyond creating goals for organizational-communal activities, and methods for achieving them, visions also contribute to the group-community's collective identity and meaning. Visions de-

lineate the values and principles that will guide future efforts, presenting a permanent touchstone to steer daily activities.

Additionally, leadership may comprise a broad range of functions and tasks that can leave an indelible imprint on its character. The literature on community leadership (Kahn, 1994; Bobo et al, 2001) shows that leaders are likely to execute a variety of roles, including tactical or strategic, decision-making, administrative and managerial, direct field activities, and team building.

Finally, the question arises as to whether one can learn or be trained to be a leader, or if leadership is related to innate qualities and traits. York and Havassay (1997) found that institutional courses for developing activists-leaders contributed significantly to the development and socialization of the participants. A different approach advocates developing leadership through a less formalized route, which emphasizes intuitive, rather than academic processes-and sometimes not even conscious ones (Kahn, 1994). With the movement away from the Trait Approach to leadership, there has been a growing consensus that leadership is an acquired characteristic and that the appropriate role for formal institutions should be to focus on developing methods and tools that systematically improve learning processes (Aglooba-Segurno, 1997; Hollister and Mehrotra, 1999; Zachary, 2000).

The existing literature fails to adequately address the perceptions of grassroots community leaders about their personal experiences becoming, developing and functioning as effective leaders within an organizational context. The current study was conducted in order to examine these phenomena and to identify a variety of leadership patterns in task-oriented groups, including some additional dimensions, which are discussed below.

METHODS

This was a qualitative study, which examined the patterns that contribute to successful leadership by focusing on the opinions of a purposive sample of grassroots leaders (Peters and Waterman, 1984; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Veltmeyer and Petras, 2002). Twenty three leaders were identified by members of governance boards and staffs of fifteen selected non-profit community grassroots organizations in a northeastern U. S. state. These leaders reflected a variety of constituencies, including youth, senior citizens, homeless people, mental health consumers, environmental activists, affordable housing advocates, low

and moderate income people. Selection criteria were designed to choose successful leaders, including: (1) Outstanding volunteers/non-paid community members; (2) Community members who had provided leadership for prominent grassroots organizations or change efforts; and (3) Community members who generally were regarded as highly effective leaders.

The respondent leaders came from organizations with both social action (sixteen) and community development (seven) orientations. Social action is characterized by collective efforts to overcome resistance to change and utilizes either campaign strategies to persuade institutional decision-makers or contests to coerce concessions (Alinsky, 1971; Rothman, 1979; Cox, 1991; Breton, 1995; Bobo et al, 1996; Fisher and Shragge, 2000; Staples, 2004). Community development seeks to engage participants in constructive activities and processes to produce improvements, opportunities, structures, goods and services that increase the quality of life and build member capacities (Rothman, 1979; Rubin and Rubin, 1992; Brueggemann, 2002; Staples, 2004).

Twelve of the leaders selected were women and eleven were men. The majority of respondents were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five, however two were in their teens and five were above fifty-five. Education levels ranged from less than a high school education through a masters degree. A plurality had completed high school but did not hold a college degree, although eight respondents had a bachelors degree or higher.

Data collection. This study employed in-depth interviews as the primary means of data collection. Several initial close-ended questions obtained basic demographic information, followed by general inquiries about leadership issues and then more structured questions. First, the interview consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the grassroots leaders' practice experience and knowledge. Here, the respondents were asked to describe how they became leaders, their experience with leadership development, and their current means of operating. These general open-ended questions were not tied to particular models and theories.

Second, respondents were asked to describe the following dimensions: their roles as leaders, vision and goals, tasks and processes, volunteerism and incentives, relations and interactive processes with followers, power and influence, and the leadership learning process. While the literature does touch on these issues, the general questions raised in an open-ended format permitted leaders to explain their experiences, attitudes, and opinions in their own words.

Next, respondents were asked more structured questions. For example: "What's more important, task or process?"; "Are leaders made or born?"; "What's more important, experience or formal learning?"; etc. More structured questions also were asked as a result of these leaders' answers. In all cases, interviewers attempted to capture the respondents' descriptions in their own words-not to direct them in specific directions or toward preferable options.

Content analysis. Interviews were audio-tape recorded and lasted 90 to 120 minutes. The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by the two authors, who worked closely to identify categories, reading the interviews jointly to obtain reliability and agreement about patterns and themes. Data from the interviews was coded and classified into the appropriate categories; and then, subjects, words, sentences, and ideas from each paragraph were sorted into these categories. Consistent with this study's goals, the researchers allowed themes to emerge from responsive statements made by the leaders, rather than seeking to confirm a set of preconceived notions about the nature and characteristics of leadership. While most of the leadership literature concentrates on behaviors, this study focused on the expressed views, opinions, and self-conceptions of grassroots leaders.

FINDINGS

The content analysis yielded several categories within the basic lines of inquiry: *becoming a leader*, *leadership developmental processes*, and *action-interaction patterns*. The findings are presented below.

I. Becoming a Leader

Paths to leadership. Most respondents reported initial involvement in a particular issue or social condition directly affecting the quality of their lives. However, there was no single path to becoming a leader. Some initially became activists because of a broader concern about social injustice; others developed greater awareness about inequities only after initial involvement. Many grassroots leaders became active through a gradual process; others got involved quickly through special campaigns. Some accumulated experience prior to becoming leaders, even as early as childhood, while others first joined at a much later stage in their lives.

I was always outspoken when it came to issues that affect us as immigrants.

When I lost my sight, it took me a long time to find out what my rights were and who was responsible for protecting my rights. So, I made a decision that I would pursue education about civil rights.

Actually, the Board, when they selected me, they asked me if I would consider being a leader. I said, "Sure." I didn't mind being it. I would give it a try.

I think often there is a vacuum, where if you have some energy and some time and some commitment, you can step right in.

I had a big water leak and my kid was eighteen months old. And it got wet, damp, dewy, and nobody would do nothing about it. There was a task force . . . but I don't think it was working very well, and I couldn't get nobody to help me and support me, so I had to take matters into my own hands.

II. Leadership Development Processes

Career development. All the leaders interviewed held a formal position. They belonged to committees, task forces and boards; and most were officers-chairs, co-chairs, presidents, vice presidents, secretaries and treasurers-in their respective organizations. These formal positions provided grassroots leaders with a clear source of authority, direction and responsibility. However, all of them combined a primary identification with a specific, formal position with a variety of informal group roles and tasks undertaken because of their high personal motivation.

Many described their experiences with various task-oriented groups as significant for their leadership development. Beginning as members of committees, task forces or boards, they progressed through these middle positions to their current top leadership roles as officers and committee chairs. This "leadership career" enabled them to utilize diverse sources of strength and influence to advance from mundane detail work to positions of increasing responsibility.

Determination in the face of adversity. Getting other community members involved and keeping them active is a challenge for most grassroots leaders. Indeed, this undertaking is inherent in a leader's role, since one cannot lead without followers. Many respondents cited

difficulties such as overcoming skepticism, developing better recruitment and persuasive skills, convincing others to stand firm in the face of opposition, and maintaining relationships while pushing people to do more.

It's very easy to get myself to do something, but very hard to get someone else to do it . . . to get people to understand that they have to act in their own behalf.

However, these successful leaders shared proven track-records of meeting such challenges and persisting in the face of adversity.

Recruiting people has to be done all the time . . . What you really have to do is develop a leadership, a trusted leadership, and share the work.

A lot of people don't think they have the capability of doing things, and actually they can do tremendous jobs. You've got to get people to understand, give them confidence in themselves, that's what develops leadership . . . but also, sometimes you have to push them into it. You've got to get people to expand their capabilities and expand their roles, to reach their potential.

Respondents mentioned a host of other difficulties, including insufficient time, lack of appreciation, conflicting family responsibilities, shyness, varying expectations by community members, frustration and impatience with the failure to make progress on particular change efforts. When asked what motivated them to continue as leaders when encountering such difficulties, they listed a number of different factors, with organizational success and victories on change efforts most commonly cited.

Victories keep you going . . . they build you up and they give you the incentive to keep going.

One of the things that motivates you to continue is if you experience success . . . also a sense that you are creating something that's tangible, that's visible.

Other reasons included passion, self-interest, personal satisfaction, energy derived from inspiring others, being inspired *by* others, personal

development, seeing others progress, commitment to a long-range vision, recognition and respect.

Most leaders had found times for taking a break during their careers, helping to prevent burn-out and to "recharge their batteries."

You have to back away once in a while and take a rest . . . you sometimes become burned out and don't know it-or keep going when you should take a week, or two, or three, just get away and spend time relaxing and recharge your batteries. I think people really have to pace themselves.

Other techniques utilized to prevent burning-out included not spending inordinate time attempting to convince resistant community members, developing new leaders, periodically slowing down to gain perspective, and learning to say "no."

Improvements through experiential learning. While a number of respondents agreed with the phrase "either you are or you aren't born with leadership qualities," all recognized the significance of the learning process in their personal development. They emphasized informal learning processes (indirect, unconscious and unplanned) more than formal institutional learning (direct, conscious and planned). Additionally, these leaders typically learned inductively through first-hand experience, feedback and a reflective process rather than by operating from and testing models of theoretical knowledge. Except for two leaders who assigned equal importance to formal institutional frameworks for learning, all others placed more importance on the informal non-institutional learning associated with personal experience accomplishing practical tasks within their respective groups. Some leaders emphasized a continuum of experimental learning. For example:

For me leadership development should happen ongoing . . . Nothing is greater than learning from experience. A lot of stuff that I have done I learned by experience . . . You learn from mistakes, you laugh about it, and you continue.

Nevertheless, most leaders recognized the importance of integrating, institutional and non-institutional learning. One observed:

It's like learning a language. You can learn it pretty good on paper, but you don't really get to know the language unless you go out

and speak to the people who speak that language. And the same way, you can go to those schools about how to organize and there's training . . . but if you're not ready to go into the community . . . you're just not going to be good. So I think training should be on the job.

When speaking about institutional learning, the respondents frequently mentioned the ability to be enriched by external frameworks or professionals. In many cases, they stressed the importance of getting feedback from trainers and other leaders.

I think it's important, because formal leadership training, I think, teaches a person how to pick up on social cues, interpersonal skill cues that they may not otherwise be aware of. And I think that you can learn a lot from people if you know what to look for, if you're trained to know what to look for and how to speak to them.

Finally, respondents indicated other important knowledge and skills learned, including recruitment, strategic planning, decision-making, internal conflict resolution, public speaking, dealing with decision-makers, and negotiating. Two additional dimensions associated with group dynamics also frequently were cited—teamwork and conducting meetings.

III. Action-Interaction Patterns

Articulating a vision. Most of the leaders described mission, platform, or general strategic goals, rather than specific objectives. They formulated and expressed visions that included values, norms and goals. For example:

The community should have a city government that's representative . . . public schools that are representative and that allow people to learn in their own way, but also that nurture and challenge young people to develop the confidence they need to triumph and to lead the community.

I'm really committed to young people, and so I seek to create spaces where they can grow up safely . . . where they can see their experiences as resources in learning . . . for me, the idea of transformation is very important and I'm pretty much game with anything that I think would benefit community transformation, but I

do have that particular passion for young people, so that's what I do.

Usually these leaders' visions developed from alternatives discussed in formal and informal groups. And whether the vision was initiated by the leader or developed collaboratively, it became the common ground embraced by the majority of group members. For example:

We identify common needs and goals and find solutions to the problems or solutions to reaching, to meeting those needs. And it's looking at a big picture not just individual needs all over the place but identifying the real-I'd say the five big ones, and then finding people and motivating people to really come to a solution to make something work.

Most leaders emphasized activating people toward a vision as a matter of belief, spirit, challenge and volunteerism, rather than exchange (businesslike) relations.

You do it because you feel it. If you don't, you cannot be, I think, a leader.

I have been a volunteer for a good thirty years . . . I didn't seek to get paid . . . it would be very difficult for me to look upon someone who saw the need to do good and volunteered to do good only because of economic compensation.

However, most respondents were sensitive to the need to provide modest and limited rewards for organizational activists. For example, You have to remember to thank people . . . I would write them letters and thank them, and acknowledge their individual effort. We did a lot of parties in our homes, a lot of social rewards where everyone would come over and they would have a good time. I think giving people credit publicly is very important, and there's no salary . . . so crediting that. The other thing I've noticed, that I've done in the past is talking about the kinds of wonderful things the people have done for other people and for their children.

Task vs. process. When respondents discussed their orientation toward accomplishing tasks and engaging in participatory group processes, only one placed task completion first. A slight majority placed

equal value on both, while a significant minority clearly emphasized the group process.

. . . you don't get the task completed unless you have good process. I think they're equally important. If you never complete a task, you're not getting anywhere, but on the other hand, there may be something wrong with your process. You have to look at them both.

The process is very important because that is where people learn and become real leaders, I think. I would probably go more towards the process.

Respondents also were asked about the importance of representing the views of their followers versus promoting their own ideas. All except three leaders noted the importance of participatory group processes and emphasized reciprocity with their followers. Delegating responsibilities was viewed as an important means for membership involvement and the development of new leaders.

I don't think that you can be in a collective organization without sharing some vision with the people you're with, and I think would naturally tend to go where the organization is going to go, because more often than not, say seven out of ten times, you're going to agree with where the organization's going. Those other three times, you feel like you don't think this is the way to do it, but you can hold yourself back and say, "I'll go along anyway, because that's where the group is going." If you're the only one who has a different opinion, what does that mean, everybody else is wrong?

I actually use delegating responsibilities a lot when it comes to committee meetings and when the committee meetings are held based on volunteers. Because when you give someone something to do, they feel that they have to be responsible to produce it, and I never give anything I know they can't accomplish. . . . And that way, they keep coming, being valued.

Preference to work independently in small groups. Most of the leaders shared responsibilities for fulfilling organizational tasks with other group members and didn't rely on outside professionals. One observed: We always worked in some kind of group, whether it was a committee, ad hoc, or informal; . . . I always had a coalition of people around me. It

was a very collaborative experience. We worked with-there is a group of people who all have worked together on a long term basis . . . and we all know each other . . . and feel kindly towards each other. We did get help from outside organizations which helped create some of the infrastructure, but I have to say we've been a pretty independent group. Although we may have read the materials they gave us, we didn't need a lot of human resources from them.

The leaders described their roles in small groups (usually between five and eleven members) and the importance of a collaborative atmosphere for development and success. Cooperative relations among group members was a consistent theme.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that these grassroots leaders had varying experiences and held distinct opinions regarding each of the three basic lines of inquiry-paths to becoming a leader, leadership development processes and action/interaction patterns. However, the respondents also exhibited many shared attitudes about both developmental and interactional patterns, while not agreeing on a single path to becoming a leader. These findings are discussed below.

Becoming leaders. A single uniform track for producing successful leaders can not be identified. Most initially became involved in pursuit of their own immediate self-interests; however, some were more concerned about achieving larger social change and focusing on the needs of their communities. They had assorted motivations, expectations, characteristics and qualities. Such differences continued after these grassroots leaders joined an organization. Some emerged as leaders on their own, others answered the call of issue campaigns that beckoned to them, and still others developed gradually over time. They established themselves using diverse sources of strength and influence. Moreover, their reasons for persisting in their roles when faced with difficulties varied, as did the techniques they employed to avoid burn-out.

All this is to say that identifying grassroots leadership is not like focusing on a market segment. Grassroots leaders in community organizations do not fit a single profile; they get involved for multiple reasons, and travel divergent paths as they take on group roles of increasing responsibility. Yet, despite differences in the manner in which these

grassroots leaders became engaged, developed, and grew, a number of common patterns emerged, as will be discussed below.

The development of successful leaders. Although they represented a grassroots membership, these successful leaders developed by taking on different formal group roles, assuming new public positions, and following a career path associated with increasing authority and prestige. Clearly, an appropriate career track was critical for the success experienced by the respondents. Their positions provided a degree of security, as well as expanding their roles. Often, they interrupted their leadership careers; many took a break because of difficulties associated with their position, such as insufficient time, lack of recognition, family responsibilities and frustration with failures. These respites often had the additional benefit of allowing new group leadership to emerge and assume the vacated positions.

In addition, all these grassroots leaders underwent a process of learning and improving their abilities and skills. The primary way that they developed was through non-institutional learning in the course of their organizational experience. They were active learners as they gained experience, coping with a variety of problems and challenges. For most, the learning process began with practical experience through group action, followed by reflection, discussion and analysis, along with feedback from other group members and leaders or the help of a trainer. Their personal experiences might be compared with other practical options or with formal theoretical models. Their successes, as well as their failures, furnished them with valuable hands-on knowledge and understanding, which they could use for future undertakings.

These findings also show a number of processes for institutionalized learning that may be additional aids. Many respondents noted that conceptual knowledge helped them gain deeper insight into leadership roles, enabling them to develop a broader picture and guidelines for appropriate behavior. The interviewees identified particular needs for skill building in strategic planning, recruitment, teamwork, conducting meetings, dealing with decision-makers, public speaking, negotiating, and mediating group conflicts. However, most felt that the institutionalized approach fails to offer grassroots leaders sufficient guidance for *action*, and it is necessary to combine conceptual knowledge with an experiential process.

An institutionalized experiential process has the advantage of enabling leaders to develop gradually as they take on additional group roles and reflect on their experiences. Experiential processes may include feedback from skilled trainers and other participating task-group

leaders. The importance of feedback lies in its capacity to instill participants with a higher awareness of their own actions.

Preferences for action/interaction patterns. The research findings indicate a tendency for grassroots leaders to have distinct preferences for certain action patterns over others. One of the preeminent characteristics of successful leaders is their ability to develop goals and guiding principles—a vision and set of operating guidelines for collective action over the long-term. The ability of leaders to set organizational direction appears to meet an important need for their followers. The vision allows them to handle the complexity and uncertainty so characteristic of many of the social situations in which they operate. These findings are consistent with other research in the field that indicates the importance for successful leaders to develop a powerful vision (Berson et al, 2001; Haslam and Platow, 2001). However, the findings also indicate some additional directions and patterns that characterize effective grassroots task-oriented group leadership.

First, while these leaders did refer to specific objectives and concrete actions, they also employed the language of vision. Indeed, successful leadership is associated with the ability to articulate a clear and compelling picture of the future for the community. It is not sufficient for leaders merely to develop specific objectives and action plans. They also must be able to formulate the initial social-organizational identity, as well as the ethical and social significance ascribed to the group's activities.

Second, while the successful leaders interviewed made their individual marks in their respective organizational contexts, these visions were constructed collectively with other group members through participatory processes. These effective grassroots leaders performed their roles in a manner that enabled other community members to contribute their ideas, needs and personal views as common goals were forged and future were established through reciprocal task group processes.

Third, leaders cannot disregard the need for a rewards system that takes into consideration the issue of reciprocity. The respondents pointed out the benefits that evolved from their active participation in community affairs. Most were inspired primarily by the creation and pursuit of a shared vision. Nevertheless, they were aware of the importance of providing recognition and symbolic rewards for organizational activists as incentives participation.

Fourth, the respondents integrated both process and task dimensions in their roles as leaders, but tended to place more value on group process. They encouraged others to examine social conditions from differ-

ent angles; they broadened the perspective from which group members scrutinized situations, and they did not necessarily solve problems for others. Participatory group processes were a consistency theme. They operated through cooperation, while minimizing manipulation or the direct exercise of their authority in contrast to leaders who tend to be highly assertive, self-promoting or controlling.

Fifth, all these leaders worked together with colleagues in small groups when making decisions and completing tasks, rather than operating alone. Community activities usually are too complex and intricate for one person to handle. Successful leadership entails identifying and capitalizing on group capabilities to accomplish goals, objectives and specific tasks. These findings are consistent with other research which notes contributions from group members taking joint responsibility for problem solving to produce innovative solutions (Ephross and Vassil, 1988; Nanus, 1992; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Silvasubramaniame et al, 2002).

Respondents without fail cited small task groups as the primary arena in which they established and deepened relationships with their followers. The group context provided the opportunity for reciprocal processes to occur and enabled members to exert influence in discussions, decisions and directions for action. These successful leaders all worked effectively within small group settings to draw on the experiences and expertise of other community activists to facilitate participatory democratic decision-making processes, and to delegate responsibility. Reciprocity was key to their success, and small task groups enabled them to develop and actualize the requisite mutual relations with organizational members.

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