



“Sorting Out” collective leadership: How Q-methodology can be used to evaluate leadership development

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ABSTRACT

Q-methodology has proven to be an effective way to solicit participants' perceptions of outcomes. In this article, Q-methodology is described as a data collection tool that can be used to better evaluate the development of collective leadership. Additionally, this methodology provided a valuable tool for participants themselves (leadership development) and evaluators (evaluation development). In writing this article, we drew upon data from a longitudinal study of the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative at six sites from 2002 through 2007 where multiple data collection strategies were employed, including Q-methodology.

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1. Introduction

Evaluation of leadership programs has focused on measuring and describing individual development, practice, and impacts. What remains conspicuously absent from the leadership evaluation literature is a more inclusive diversity of voices that empowers multiple groups (not just individuals) to make meaning of leadership (*beliefs*) and to engage in collaborative leadership activities (*action*).² This alternative to the one-person tradition of leadership, toward the inclusion of diverse voices, histories, languages, and cultures, reflects our current realities (see Benham, 2002; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004). Hence, new metrics must be developed and used to measure this type of leadership. Moreover, new evaluative practices must be devised and implemented in order to understand leadership development initiatives that take aim at these new traditions of leadership.

In this article, we describe an evaluative tool that was used to measure the perceived growth in collective leadership with participants in the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative. KLCC provides an example of a nontraditional leadership development initiative. Our purpose is to elucidate the *use of* and *learning from* a nontraditional evaluation approach, Q-methodology, to measure depth of understanding and degree of action regarding the practice of collective leadership. We begin by describing the KLCC initiative and the evaluation challenges that emerged. Next, we provide an overview of our evaluation design that included multiple data collection strategies. We describe how Q-methodology was employed from development to collection to analysis, and how that helped us develop deeper understandings of how collective leadership was realized (or not) by community members. We then provide examples of how the Q data helped us develop findings within and across sites. Finally, we discuss what we learned using Q-methodology and how it has sustained work in the KLCC I communities and how it informed our KLCC II longitudinal evaluation.

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² Recently there has been some movement to capture this new trend (see Chavis, 2001; Hannum, Martineau & Reinelt, 2007; Hyde & Chavis, 2006).

2. Evaluation challenges: How we approached a new leadership initiative

2.1. *The Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative*

Building on a long-time commitment to leadership development, in 2002 the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) launched a new kind of leadership development program. As communities have become more diverse, the need for leaders who can work collectively across boundaries – of race, culture, age, class, faith, and so on – has become more pressing. Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) seeks to actively engage residents in working together to address community issues and improve the quality of life in their community. Leadership, in this view, is not the purview of an individual leader or of those who hold formal leadership positions, but rather the collaboration of what leaders and followers do together for the common good.

In each session of KLCC, a focus topic is selected and grantees, called the host organization, are selected. The host organization identifies a diverse group of 25 individuals (leadership fellows) who undertake a series of experiences designed to build their individual leadership skills as well as to create a group of leaders who know how to collaborate effectively to bring about change in their communities. An intermediary organization, called the Coordinating Organization (CO), provides an overall change framework that the host organization may use (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2007). They also coach the host organization's leadership team and provide specific leadership development tools (Hughes, Nienow, Ruder, Hale, & Rollins, 2005; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2006). In addition, the CO nurtures a national learning community by convening project leaders and coaches on regular conference calls and networking meetings. Finally, an evaluation of each site is conducted.³

In 2002, six sites were selected for the first session, which focused on the theme of teaching and learning, they included: Edcouch-Elsa, Texas; Laguna-Acoma, New Mexico; Ronan, Montana; Buffalo, New York; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; and five communities in northwestern Wisconsin. The sites received direct support and funding for an 18-month period. Additionally, Kellogg provided support for sustaining local efforts and national gatherings. The W. K. Kellogg goal for these sites stated:

[The] creation of a critical mass of community-based leaders who are prepared and committed to not only making progress on one issue, but who become a core community leadership group ready and able to tackle new issues as they arise.

KLCC participants knew this process of leadership as “collective leadership.” In short, the KLCC initiative is an evolutionary next step in leadership development for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation because it emphasized leadership development as a process for creating community change through collective action among individual leaders nurtured by the program. It also places emphasis on the participation of nontraditional leaders and their ability to work across cultural and ethnic boundaries. At the same time that it works in a particular community, it also engages diverse communities simultaneously in a common issue for which they share the process of learning how to generate a collective vision, articulate designs for action, and begin implementing that vision.

In 2006, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation commissioned a longitudinal evaluation of the KLCC initiative to ascertain how collective leadership has been realized in the session one communities. The longitudinal evaluation questions focused on how collective leadership was formed, engaged, and sustained (see Appendix A for specific evaluation questions). In the end, our challenge was to understand the degree to which collective leadership was used to generate sustainable change in the participating communities.

2.2. *Evaluating a nontraditional leadership program*

Traditionally, the evaluation of leaders and leadership has focused on outcomes. For example, in educational leadership, attempts to link leadership characteristics to student achievement have proven difficult and often have been fraught with methodological problems. Nonetheless, researchers have attempted to understand the influence of leadership characteristics on outcomes, usually through meta-analytic techniques (see Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Horton, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Some investigators have studied leaders and general leadership development strategies (Brungardt, 1996; Day, 2001; Rohs, 2002; Rohs & Langone, 1997), whereas others have focused on specific topics such as student development (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) and philanthropic organizations (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). However, Yukl (2002) posited that the challenge of evaluating leadership remains. Collins and Horton (2004) stated, “Even though leadership development interventions are pervasive, research also indicates that organizations are spending little time evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions” (p. 218). Moreover, although “evaluators are likely to incorporate components of several approaches to enhance the viability and fidelity of program evaluation” (Bledsoe & Graham, 2005, p. 303), there is a scarcity of research on the topic (Chavis, 2004).

The backbone of the KLCC initiative is the development and promulgation of collective leadership. To measure how collective leadership was understood and practiced and to what degree these practices/actions impacted work toward change in communities, we first needed to operationalize the concept of collective leadership. To begin, we anchored the big idea of collective leadership in the literatures of social justice, culture, and spirituality. Rawls (1971) posited that social justice has four principles:

1. Everyone receives equality of treatment — equal rights and liberties;
2. All people are regarded as individuals;
3. Everyone is given a fair chance (opportunity); and
4. The greatest social and economic benefits go to the most disadvantaged.

³ The evaluation team for KLCC I included: Maenette K. P. Benham (lead evaluator), Rick Price (co-lead evaluator), Matthew Militello (graduate assistant), Patrick Halladay (graduate assistant), Crystal Elissetche (youth evaluator), and Teresa Behrens, W. K. Kellogg Foundation Director of Evaluation.

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