Toward Understanding the Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership Skills on Community Engagement

Marisa Cleveland, *Northeastern University*
Simon Cleveland

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/simon_cleveland/
Toward Understanding the Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership Skills on Community Engagement

Marisa Cleveland¹ and Simon Cleveland²

¹College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
²Graduate Professional Studies, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract: While poor community engagement is characterized by high crime rate, high poverty, and low education levels, a community that is highly engaged will have solved such problems. As a result, it is critical to determine the variables that positively impact community engagement. To address this problem, the current study proposes that entrepreneurs with strong leadership skills built through leadership programs are capable of uniting communities through social capital. The study provides a causal model to explain the role of leadership development programs and their indirect effect on building engaged communities.

Keywords: community engagement, social capital, leadership programs

1. Introduction

Poor community engagement is characterized by high crime rate, high poverty, and low education levels (Saegert and Winkel 2004). A community that is highly engaged will have solved such problems. Leaders who participate in community leadership development programs create engaged communities (Azzam and Riggio 2003; Russon and Reinelt 2004) since leadership development programs train emerging leaders with the purpose of developing their leadership skills and enhancing their knowledge of topics (Black and Earnest 2009). While community leadership development programs are designed to cultivate the emerging leaders with a specific skill set to address community challenges and create positive change for their communities (Azzam and Riggio 2003), there is a gap in understanding whether community leadership development programs influence indirectly community engagement and under what conditions. This study proposes a causal model to address this gap by examining the impact of entrepreneurial leadership skills on community engagement and the role that leadership development programs play in the development of such skills.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Community Engagement

The building blocks of a community, its citizens and their participation in community activities, shape the degree of an engaged community. Civic engagement builds awareness about politics and local issues (Reinke, 2003), culminates in citizen collaboration, which promotes effective communities through positive community change (Foster-Fishman et al 2001), and leads to positive benefits such as longer, healthier lifestyles (Bassler et al 2008). According to Weerts (2014) community engagement is defined as a partnership and reciprocity of mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. Communities with strong local leaders tend to have a positive impact on social issues, such as lower crime rates, higher performing schools, and more effective government (Azzam and Riggio 2003). The ability for local groups, businesses, and non-profits to work together is crucial for promoting positive community change (Wituk et al 2005).

Civic engagement occurs when local entrepreneurs seek to improve their community’s conditions or shape the direction of the community’s future (Adler and Goggin 2005). Building an engaged community improves the lives of the residents (Corrigan 2000). Leaders with increased awareness of cultural differences will be better equipped to create solutions for the challenges faced with poor community engagement (Black and Earnest 2009).

2.2 Entrepreneurial Leadership Skills

Social entrepreneurship is defined as the social responsibility of entrepreneurs to improve their local communities (Wallace 1999). Local entrepreneurs have the ability to create positive change and create community engagement through exercising strong charismatic leadership skills that influence followers in a
lead-by-example way. For example, Groves (2005) found a relationship between charismatic leaders, their followers, and willingness to follow specific types of leaders. This relationship proved beneficial for leaders seeking to create or maintain sustainable engaged communities.

Leadership theory posits that when individuals see someone as a leader, they use preconceived notions to attribute characters to that person to fit a prototype of a leader (Judge, Colbert, and Ilies 2004). Tubbs and Schulz (2006) defined leadership as the ability to influencing others to accomplish certain goals. Inspiring entrepreneurial leaders are essential for the success of any community since they are perceived by others as possessing knowledge and sensitivity to the problems of the community (Bass 1988).

A key quality of an inspirational leader is a passion to help others. This type of quality is associated with servant leadership. Leading is a form of guiding and supporting, understanding, being genuine, developing relationships, and building a community. Albright (2016) identified servant leaders as those who influence their community through inspiration, equality, community incorporation, and guidance.

In addition to passion to help others, inspiring leaders are also competent leaders. Competence is a thirst for knowledge and self-improvement that demonstrates skills needed to overcome challenges. De Pree (2002) argued that competent leaders are transforming leaders. These leaders focus on tasks that help understand what motivates and influences the community, how to coach and help citizens, and how to measure what citizens want (Galloway, 2016). Finally, strong leaders who understand the importance of social networks and build these networks through social capital are able to address their community’s areas of concern (Valk 2008).

2.3 Community Leadership Development Programs

Leadership development programs are designed to build a network of community leaders through continuing education. Such programs provide formal and local program for leaders to gain the applicable skills necessary for serving their communities (Russon and Reinelt 2004) and have been found to act as a tool for meaningful civic engagement (Callahan and Yang 2005). They promote solutions to complex community challenges facing many communities and emphasize the importance of building skills that foster collaboration and positive sustainable change (Williams and Wade 2002). The programs allow participants to establish social networks and build social capital through which they are able to better influence their communities (Azzam and Riggio 2003; Black and Earnest 2009). They help create relationships among the leaders, as well as awareness for the benefits of community engagement, inspiring more citizens to assume leadership roles within the community.

Many programs encourage community involvement, thus helping entrepreneurs learn about the societal and economic challenges of the community (Azzam and Riggio 2003). For example, Einfeld and Collins (2008) found that leadership programs increased participants’ awareness of social justice, multicultural competence, and civic engagement, leading to commitment to continued civic engagement. Programs provide participants with personal growth, community commitment and knowledge, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Apaliyah et al 2012). Moreover, such programs foster change through dialogue, collective empowerment, connective leadership and an increased awareness of cultural diversity (Black and Earnest 2009; Kirk and Shutte 2004).

A combination of leadership training and social capital affects how entrepreneurs interact as citizens in their daily lives, because communities make important contributions to governance, while the ongoing relationships among community members enforce group norms (Bowles and Gintis 2002). Entrepreneurial leaders benefit from participating in leadership programs through the development of comprehensive understanding of citizenship and a culture for civic engagement. By participating in a program that facilitates the collaboration of intelligent, creative leaders, local groups, business, and non-profits, local entrepreneurs can begin to work together to strengthen a community (Wituk et al 2005).
3. Proposed Causal Model

This study proposed that community engagement is developed through entrepreneurial leadership skills that are formulated through community leadership development programs. As a result, the following causal model to explain the relationship between the variables is proposed.

![Proposed causal model](image)

Figure 1: Proposed causal model

4. Conclusion

When leaders acquire the skills necessary to achieve high levels of community engagement, the community becomes a desirable location to live, work, and recreate. Communities with high levels of engagement offer activities that are meaningful to the citizens and align with their personal goals and backgrounds (Maton 2008). Community leadership development programs are designed to train entrepreneurs on how to be effective leaders in their communities, by developing leadership skills and enhancing their awareness in personal growth, community commitment, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Apaliyah et al 2012). By focusing on the skills leaders need as the foundation for building engaged communities, citizens will realize a better quality of life. Future research will test the causal model through quantitative study of local entrepreneurs and leadership programs in townships, municipalities, community organizations, and civic associations.
References


