WHO MAKES COMMUNITY CHANGE FOR WHOM: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
CIVIC LEADERSHIP BY CITIZENS IN A MIDWESTERN RURAL COMMUNITY

by

DANIEL W KAHL

B.S., Iowa State University, 1987
M.L.S., Fort Hays State University, 1999

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2012

Abstract

Community leadership development programs often strive to cultivate civic leadership as an approach that involves citizens in activities and efforts which serve the common good. This descriptive case study examines citizen perspectives of civic leadership in a rural Kansas community to better understand how citizens: 1) understand civic leadership, 2) are involved in civic leadership activities, 3) perceive their ability to participate in civic leadership, and 4) classify opportunities for civic leadership in their community over time. The community identified is a purposeful selection of a community identified as having strong civic leadership characteristics. Through individual interviews; focus group interviews; field observations; and supporting physical artifacts, this study triangulates findings to get a "picture" of citizen perspectives of their capacity for civic leadership. The study provides insight into how citizens perceive their ability to participate in the leadership of the community and to what degree they feel their participation is important and effective in bringing about change.

Findings include that citizens identified civic leadership as action based in personal commitment and applied to community betterment. Avenues to engage in civic leadership include service through community organizations or local government, or by initiating action to address emerging issues. Not all citizens expressed full confidence and ability in making community change, and while several income levels demonstrated mixed results, only the lowest income study participants all expressed mixed combinations of ability and/or confidence in making community change. Case study discussion considers connections between civic leadership and community development and civic leadership activities in light of community power and community capacity building.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding support and guidance provided by the co-chairs of this study, Dr. Jeong Hee Kim, and Dr. Jeff Zacharakis who spent many hours working with me in the crafting of this study. It is also important to acknowledge the good people of the community of Wilhelm who participated in this study.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my loving wife, Joan Kahl, who kept the world at bay to allow me to complete my studies. The community in this case study, given the pseudonym "Wilhelm" is in dedication to my good friend and colleague Beverly Wilhelm. Her support and encouragement was influential in starting me on the path of this Ph. D. It seemed fitting that a rural community in Kansas, full of energy and engaged citizens, carry the name of someone who encouraged the same, and has done so much for rural Kansas.

Chapter 1 - A Call for Civic Leadership

Community development programs are increasingly supporting concepts embraced by civic leadership as a preferred approach to meaningful engagement and leadership. Fey, Bregendahl, and Flora (2006) report that a successful community development technique is to have communities "encourage the emergence of new community leadership" (p. 20). Civic leadership describes a grass-roots approach to community development. This approach embraces efforts to empower citizens for active civic life and encourages public participation to identify and resolve shared community issues. Community leadership programs serve as a primary tool to educate citizens about the value of engagement and to provide opportunities to become civically involved. An effort to build citizen capacity for civic leadership is present in many community leadership programs; however, there is little research that connects the outcomes of community leadership programs to increased capacity for community development (Pigg, et al., 2007; Van De Valk & Constas, 2011). In addition, there is even less research that documents or describes how the outcome of civic leadership is experienced by community members. The overarching question driving this investigation is: "How do citizens experience civic leadership?" This question, rarely asked but identified as profoundly important to the future of rural communities, looms as a fundamental enigma to community developers.

This study examines the experiences of civic leadership by citizens in a rural Midwestern community to learn how community members understand and interpret their access to leadership and power. In doing so, the study aims to provide an important exploration for a deeper understanding of how citizens perceive their ability to participate in leadership to create positive

community change. The study addresses the gap between the theory of civic leadership and its application in practice through firsthand exploration. Discussion in this chapter is organized in the following sections: (1) overview of the issue, (2) statement of the problem, (3) purpose of the study, (4) significance of the study, (5) limitations of the study (6) establishing trustworthiness, and (7) definition of terms.

Overview of the Issue

During my years of community development work at K-State Research and Extension, I have commonly heard project leaders lament the lack of citizen interest in assuming active leadership in their rural community. Without anyone willing to take active leadership roles, current leaders fear the forthcoming demise of the community in which they have invested so much to sustain. Community development specialists concur that the methods of cultivating leadership will have serious implications for the growth, sustainability, and resilience of many rural communities (Flora and Flora, 2008; Luther & Wall, 1987; Pigg, et al., 2007).

In Kansas, both public and private institutions tout the importance of investing in leadership development. For example, an economic development report published by Kansas Inc. boldly states, "Any rural development structure that does not address the leadership component is destined to fail" (Kansas Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 38). This public call for investment in leadership development suggests a belief that citizens in Kansas's communities need increased capacity to respond effectively to change. The increasing complexity of the social, economic, and cultural climate for communities is pressuring leadership to innovate and expand traditional ways of problem solving. Leadership programs that emphasize the maintenance of status quo may not foster leadership sufficient to support rural

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community sustainability. For many Kansans, there is a growing realization that communities may need to approach their leadership development differently.

Following a series of statewide focus groups on the needs surrounding improved health of Kansas communities, the Kansas Health Foundation identified the topic of expanded citizen leadership as a primary recurring topic. As summarized in the 2009 state health assessment, "These observations imply the need for a profoundly different kind of civic leadership and civic culture in the state's towns, cities, and regions" (The Kansas Health Foundation, 2009, p. 6). This message compelled the Kansas Health Foundation to create a subsidiary organization, the Kansas Leadership Center, to spearhead leadership change. The Kansas Leadership Center embraces a mission to foster civic leadership for healthier Kansas communities and strives to inspire, educate, and connect people from all areas of civic life. Since 2000, the Kansas Health Foundation and Kansas Leadership Center have engaged dozens of communities to educate and transform community leadership. Moving beyond thinking of leadership as only legitimized by position, this approach to leadership is designed to cultivate broadly shared leadership among the citizenry.

Allen, Morton, and Li (2003) describe a shared leadership approach as one that involves developing and implementing strategies for change that are inclusive of those committed to working collectively for the common good. This new approach to leadership, which shares power, responsibility, and leadership roles, challenges previously held concepts of hierarchical or positional leadership as the only authentic form of leadership.

Civic leadership acknowledges that leadership can be informal as well as formal, and that it is within the capacity of all citizens to embrace and exercise leadership. The concept of who can participate in leadership has shifted from focusing on an individual in a position of authority

as a "leader" to understanding leadership as a relationship emerging between collaborators while engaging in collective action (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Ospina & Schall, 2004; Rost, 1993). This broader understanding of leadership means the initiative and collective investment in moving a community forward is a shared responsibility. *The Journal of Kansas Civic Leadership Development* (2009) describes civic leadership as "needing to engage both 'usual' and 'unusual' voices by convening and catalyzing civic work across boundaries, facilitating learning among stakeholders and creating a sense of shared purpose" (p. 6).

Community leadership development programs supporting civic leadership are designed to create "leader-full" communities wherein citizens have an increased role in active project involvement and decision making. Broadly practiced involvement and ownership in community issues is believed to allow community networks to remain strong, and is important to community resilience. For these reasons, the development of civic leadership has become a priority of leadership development program efforts in Kansas.

Statement of the Problem

While the ideology of shared civic leadership is intuitively clear, the lived experience of shared power and leadership may, in actuality, not be as clearly understood by the citizens in a community. The term "civic leadership" is often loosely used, and is not consistently defined. The Kansas Leadership Center, which has invested heavily in the development of civic leadership programs, defines civic leadership as: "acts of leadership in which individuals attempt to enhance the common good of their community based on a perceived sense of responsibility" (Meissen, 2010). In practice, civic leadership is described as, "Moving from an exclusive, often divisive and ineffective, civic culture to a more inclusive and collaborative civic culture capable

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of doing adaptive work and ensuring accountability" (Chrislip, 2009, p. 37). The ideal of a leadership culture that exhibits the sharing of decision making, power, and influence for collaborative gain is an appealing image of shared democracy, yet there is a dearth of research that explores and describes this community level experience of civic leadership.

Researchers at Wichita State University (Wituk, 2009) completed evaluative studies of civic leadership in communities participating in the Kansas Health Foundation supported leadership development efforts. Evaluation surveys, interviews, and focus groups were used to assess the effect of the community leadership program. However, much of the evaluative work seeks participant feedback to improve the leadership program content and delivery. Effect is also measured in incremental attitude and knowledge changes within participants. Researcher Scott Wituk (2009) reports,

> It is a theory in that the causal chain (often depicted as a flow chart) is based on a series of assumptions or hypotheses about how actions or activities are intended to influence other behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, or a person's status (e.g., employment, health. Through active participation [in Kansas Leadership Center programs] participants are expected to (1) be inspired to take action; (2) connect with other participants, KLC, and others interested in community change; and (3) better understand the leadership competencies and how they apply to their own work and lives.
>
> It is believed that these initial outcomes are followed by use of the leadership competencies in community and organizational settings, which can be assessed by more summative evaluation efforts. Participants are expected not just to learn, but take action in their local communities and organizations. The "theory of change" continues by asserting that through collective efforts of participants applying the leadership

competencies in their communities and organizations, greater social capital will be created" (p. 40).

In other words, while summative community impacts are anticipated due to actions of individuals exercising leadership behaviors, there is uncertainty of how civic leadership will actually manifest itself in the communities, and if it does, how it will be experienced by citizens. In addition, while the research (Wituk, 2009; Wituk & Jolley, 2010) anticipates secondary level causal impacts of civic leadership on community outcomes, it is unclear about what these summative community level impacts are.

The qualitative case study I am proposing is a different approach than the existing evaluative assessments. While the evaluation studies measure changes in social capital, this study explores how citizens understand and experience civic leadership. The civic leadership approach is consistent with democratic ideals and with democratic government process. It is unclear, however, how civic leadership is actually experienced by the citizens in community. Does the theory of civic leadership really manifest itself in personal power distributed somewhat equally throughout the community? Or is the sharing of leadership more reflective of elitism, classism, or other community power structure theories, and constitute a hierarchal bestowing of power to select individuals or groups? What are the citizen's experiences of power sharing in a community that has adopted an inclusive approach to civic leadership?

Much of the current civic leadership evaluation focuses on the leadership program participant to assess program impacts. There is a need for a community-based study to explore how citizens have come to understand leadership and their opportunities to participate in broader community leadership efforts.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines citizen experiences of civic leadership in a Midwestern rural community to learn how community members experience and understand their own access to leadership and power. It is an important exploration and documentation of citizen perceptions in relation to their sense of agency, or their ability to engage in and create positive change. Using case study methodology, I posit the following overarching research question and four sub-questions:

"How do citizens experience civic leadership in a Midwestern rural community?"

- How do citizens understand civic leadership?

- How are citizens involved with civic leadership in this rural community?

- How do citizens perceive their ability to participate in community change?

- How do citizens perceive changes in civic leadership in the community over time?

Through individual interviews; focus group interviews; field observations; and supporting physical artifacts, this study triangulates findings to get a "picture" of citizen perspectives of their capacity for civic leadership. The study provides insight into how citizens perceive their ability to participate in the leadership of the community and to what degree they feel their participation is important and effective in bringing about change.

This research takes place in a community that embraces the concept of civic leadership and has a multi-year history of providing civic leadership programming. The research community was identified by the Kansas Leadership Center as one of a number of communities successful with leadership programming which best exemplifies civic leadership. The community selected for the study is a rural community in accordance with EDA/USDA population classifications of a rural community.

Using qualitative research methodology, I conducted multiple community focus group sessions and individual interviews. Related physical artifacts were also collected including newspaper articles, website information, and event information. Key informants for the focus groups and interviews represent diverse perspectives from within the community. The informants represent a mix of participants including people holding leadership positions of authority, people who have had strong connections with the leadership program, and persons who may not typically have as strong a voice in community change. Through listening to, and documenting the perspectives from these citizens, this study provides insight to citizens' current understanding of civic leadership and about how their perspectives on civic involvement in the community may have changed over time.

Theoretical Framework

While there is depth of literature on community social networks, structure, and community power, there has not been a great deal of research to investigate "civic leadership" at the community level. The community capitals framework created by Flora et al. (2004) provides a useful framework for understanding the aspects of a well-functioning community. This capitals approach to community, combined with a community field perspective (Bourdieu, 1983; Wilkinson, 1991), provides an important conceptual framework to describe the social combinations of individuals, relationships, features, and activities that characterize community.

Much of the research to describe the social community has resulted in a piecemeal effort to quantitatively capture and report the various aspects of relationships. Robert Putnam (1995) suggests that strong social bonds, trust, and reciprocity are components of a stronger society. By measuring the strength of both vertical and horizontal relationships, Putnam is able to quantify

and gauge the "connectedness" of people within their community. However, study methods and interpretation of results have varied. Krishna and Shrader (1999) report,

> Empirical studies of social capital differ among themselves in terms of the manner in which they have addressed these two issues. While some studies have assessed social capital solely in terms of network density, others have relied purely on a measure of trust. Yet other studies combine a measure of network density with some proxies for assessing the strength of the relevant norms (p. 3).

While tight social bonds within a community can indicate high levels of trust and reciprocity, high-bonding capital can lead to exclusivity and inaccessibility to new community members. Likewise, high levels of bridging capital may indicate a lack of group cohesion or identity. In sum, there is not a consistently uniform level of social trust and cohesion that indicates community leadership or health. The "appropriate" level of social openness and connection is dependent on the community and the current situation.

Similarly, political capital is not a fixed asset. Often, indicators of strong political capital include democratic norms, voting behavior, contacting elected officials, and campaign activism (Booth & Richard, 1998). Others use civic engagement as an indicator of political capital (Pigg, et al., 2007). However, even positive indication of an engaged political citizenry may need interpretation. While indications of expanded sharing in community power relationships may result in increased engaged community activity, Booth and Richard (1998) note that a more restrictive institutional or governmental power structure might also encourage broader citizen involvement in an effort to mobilize to express power. In essence, public repression can affect activism, whereas a less oppressive institutional or government structure may generate a malaise

in public involvement. Booth and Richard (1998) are quick to point out that the relationship appears to be interactional, not linear.

Significance of the Study

If, indeed, rural community sustainability hinges on the ability of citizens to access and exercise leadership, it is imperative that the citizen experience of civic leadership and power sharing exemplifies these characteristics. The Kansas Leadership Center clearly asserts that a new and profoundly different type of leadership will be required for rural communities to be successful and sustainable (O'Malley, 2009). The implications of a civic leadership initiative that encourages citizens to find and express their civic voices could plausibly produce a shift in both social and political capital. While this study does not directly measure a change in community capitals, it does explore citizen awareness of changes in the community.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it is an in-depth qualitative study of community-based civic leadership. While surveys allow measurement of incremental change, this case study allows a scale of investigation that quantitative assessment cannot capture. Through focus group interviews and physical artifact review, this research provides a broader perspective of civic leadership as it exists in the community. My research focus is not limited to the individual perceptions of community residents, but includes exploration of dynamics in community level social interaction. This research focus allows a deeper and more comprehensive look at civic leadership in the context of community interaction.

Second, this study contributes to community political capital research. The questions and methodology used in this case study provide further data for understanding shared power in a community field. Sociologists have described community political capital as including

"organization, connections, voice, and power" (Flora and Flora, 2008, p. 144). By exploring political capital in context of the community field (Bourdieu, 1977; Bridger, Brennan, & Luloff, 2011), this study examines the shifts in community agency, and looks for changing or emerging political capital. The case study provides a documentation that allows the reader to draw conclusions about community power dynamics.

Finally, this study is important because it is a purposeful selection of a community identified as an example of a successful example of civic leadership. This investigation documents a case from which others can learn by researching in a community that has been identified as exemplary for its civic leadership qualities. This case investigates how citizens understand civic leadership and how the leadership patterns in the community are "profoundly different" (O'Malley, 2009) as a community that has invested extensively in the development of broadly shared civic leadership.

This research is highly relevant to the study of adult education. The role of adult education has, at its heart, the obligation to build powerful people. Tisdell (1995) reflects the depth of history of addressing this subject, "The role of adult education in changing the nature of unequal power relations between privileged and oppressed groups is a concern expressed in the adult education literature (for example, Collard and Law, 1989; Cunningham, 1988; Freire, 1971)" (p. 209). Similarly, a popular theme in defining liberal education is the premise that education serves a civilizing role in society. The theme of education serving as a vehicle for building society is echoed in work by Dewey (1939), Livingstone (1945), and Hutchins (1953). Adult education pedagogy clearly pulls together the importance of helping citizens identify and access their power through leadership development to create a more engaged, sustainable

society. This study of civic leadership is an important case documentation to contribute to the field of literature in adult education.

Limitations of the Study

Case studies have been criticized for their limitations of representativeness and generalizability. As Hamel (1993) notes, "the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness" (p. 23). This refers to the difficulty of finding a case that fully characterizes or represents other cases. Due to the unique subject nature, differences in history, culture, access to resources, and the overall changing dynamics of the situation, community case studies are challenged by their lack of transferability. However, Flyvbjerg (2004) asserts that insight can be gained from individual case studies that reflect a unique situation or are purposefully selected to test a theory. Through the selection of an extreme or deviant case, information can be gained through an investigation of a specific situation. In this situation, the selection of a community that the Kansas Leadership Center has identified as exemplary of successful integration of civic leadership beliefs and practices gives the study larger transferability. While the data and findings are inevitably unique to the community studied, the data and findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the community culture, which can be compared to other studies and contribute to the formation of future learning.

Another limitation of case study research is the potential bias of the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer to "unusual problems of ethics. An unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated" (p. 378). Ethically, it is important for the data to drive the process, not the researcher choosing the data. Because of my background in community and leadership development, I certainly bring a

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philosophical paradigm and expectations to the study. This is more thoroughly detailed in chapter 3, however, it deserves notice here that the researcher is aware of the risk of bias in quality research, and is addressed by being forthright and transparent with findings and analysis.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Establishing trust in research methods is important in any qualitative study. Experts in the field have worked to define methodologies that ensure "trustworthiness" in methodology (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have drawn comparisons of methodology that ensure trustworthiness in quantitative research to suggest parallel criteria to ensure trustworthiness for qualitative research. These criteria relate to the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research.

Credibility is a term used in qualitative research to refer to what quantitative researchers might consider a study's internal validity (Miles and Huberman, 1998). In this study, several strategies are employed to assure research rigor. First, data is compiled from multiple sources during prolonged visits in the field. Through a series of community visits, research of community change events is documented through the fliers, newspapers, and blogs or internet postings; observation; personal stories and interviews; as well as focus group dialogues. Research dependability is strengthened because of this triangulated approach to data collection. To verify reliability of the data, I use member checking with interview and focus group participants to confirm that findings and interpretations are accurate.

Checks must be in place to ensure the *dependability* of this study. Dependability is a term Lincoln and Guba (1985) applied as quantitative quality assurance concept that is parallel with reliability in quantitative research. To ensure dependability in this research, this study

demonstrates full disclosure of why the community was selected for study, and keeps open record of research documentation. Transparency of research bias is addressed in this study proposal. The public disclosure of intent, design, and context support the transparency of the research (Anafra, et al., 2002).

These research strategies serve as verification procedures to support the trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research project that involves human participants, protection of human subjects is a priority consideration. This research is conducted with the consent approval from the KSU Institutional Review Board. Participants of this study were not put at risk or subject to dangers without their consent. All participation is voluntary and with written consent. While the topic of research is related to access to civic leadership, power and agency, the line of questioning and nature of this research is not intended to aggravate or surface comparative political or power disparity. Subjects participating in the study each completed an informed consent form. The agenda of research was clearly articulated and shared before the participatory consent forms were signed. Permission was sought to record interviews. Subjects are not identified in transcripts or written reports. The community of study is identified as Wilhelm, Kansas, a pseudonym. No final report, submitted articles, or published work resulting from this study will reference the case community. This includes alteration of reference for documents in the reference section of this study which would indicate the identity of the case community.

Definition of Terms

Citizens: The term citizen, as used throughout this document, is a general term to represent a member of the study community. The term is not a used in this document as a reference to formal citizenship or legal status or national affiliation.

Civic Engagement: Civically oriented actions taken as a result of an awareness of, and responsibility to, the community where one works and/or lives. Examples include: volunteering, participating in the electoral and democratic process, interaction with key leaders and other organizations, general grant making, networking, relationship building, and strategic partnerships (Foundation for the Carolinas, 2007).

Civic Leadership: Acts in which individuals attempt to enhance the common good of their community based on a perceived sense of responsibility (Meissen, 2010).

Collective Agency: The ability of a group of people to solve common problems together. In community development, people in a community must believe that working together can make a difference and organize to collectively address their shared needs (Flora & Flora, 2008).

Community: The term community, when used in reference to this study, focuses on a group of people with shared interests in a common identified geographic or politically identified location (Chaskin, 2001; Webber, 1964; Wilkinson, 1991).

Elitism: Community held power represented by a few power holders controlling the access to voice and change by others.

Member Checks: Also called respondent validation, member checking is the process of soliciting feedback on emerging findings from some of the people interviewed. Member checks help to rule out misinterpreting what participants said and meant (Merriam, 2009).

Pluralism: Community held power by the citizens or clusters of citizen alliances organized to express influence within a community. Popularized by Dahl (1961).

Political Capital: Referring to an individual's access to power, organizations, connection to resources, and power brokers (Flora et al., 2004). Political capital also refers to the ability of people to find their own voice and to engage in actions that contribute to the well-being of their community (Aigner et al., 2001).

Power: In a simple definition, power reflects the ability to act or influence the ability of others to either act or choose a path of inaction (Beaver & Cohen, 2004; Fisher & Sonn, 2007). At a community field level, however, power is often generally characterized by local power structures and primary power holders. Typically community characterizations of power range from pluralism (broadly shared within a population) to elitism (exclusive or shared by few).

Rural Community: Locations found outside census tracts with a population greater than or equal to 50,000 (Cromartie, J. & Bucholz, S., 2007).

Shared Leadership: A philosophy of leadership development that advocates collaborative work and power sharing by strengthening personal influence, broadening perspectives, and increasing knowledge and capabilities to bring about change. This is a purposeful shift of focus from power through formal authority and positional leadership.

Social Capital: Explained by Robert Putnam as the "networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1995, pp. 664-665). At a community level, social capital provides a structural framework for

measuring the social climate of a community. Social capital can be viewed as a mobilizing factor for communities.

Unusual Voices: Those individuals who have a "stake" in a community issue but are typically without influence or formal authority. Many times these "everyday citizens," especially if they are powerfully impacted by an issue, can provide helpful insights and engage in important acts of leadership that positively impact an issue (Meissen, 2010, p. 85).

Usual Voices: Those individuals, often in positions of authority, who are routinely called upon when dealing with community issues because of their real or perceived influence (Meissen, 2010, p. 85).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter presents a literature background and theoretical perspectives that provide a basis for this study. The discussion in this chapter is organized to provide a background understanding of community development and civic leadership. The review is presented in the following sections: section 1) Defining Community; the Community Capitals Framework, and Community Development Approaches; section 2) Civic Leadership, and; Community Power; section 3) Community Leadership Evaluation, and; section 4) Summary.

Because the term community is used in many different contexts, section 1 provides literary background to define community for the sake of this study. In addition, section 1 defines and explores commonly used community development approaches and their philosophical underpinnings. Section 2 examines civic leadership development literature as it relates to community capacity development. Section 2 also examines literature related to the development of personal and community power in relation to community capacity development. The community capitals framework, concepts of leadership, and community power detailed in this chapter will guide interpretation of data from this study. Section 3 examines the literary background associated with how community leadership programs have measured their impact. Following the assumption that measurement is reflective of the goals of leadership development, this section looks at efforts used to observe and measure civic leadership. Finally, section four is a summary of the referenced literature and reflection on how current research may influence this study.

Section 1: Defining Community

The term community is used in varying contexts. When used descriptively, the term can refer to a common place or a feeling of unity among a group of people. Gusfield (1975) and Chaskin, et al. (2001) include both a geographical area and social or relational components that define a community. The geographical area is characterized by natural boundaries, a particular history, specific demographic patterns, and the presence of particular industries and organizations. The social attributes include language, customs, class, and ethnicity. Carroll and Lee (1990), however, assert that the boundaries of many towns are arbitrarily defined. Community, they argue, is more accurately defined by groups of people who share an attachment to each other, the land, and their shared lives. Their assertion leads to the distinction between place-based communities and communities of interest. With the expansion of travel and increase in communication technology, relationships develop far beyond place-based communities, leading to the development of communities of interest or what Bradshaw (2008) calls a post-place community. Expounding on the work of Webber (1964) regarding the possibility of creating "community without propinquity," Bradshaw challenges the assumptions of community of place by arguing that the essential characteristics of community are the social relations between people. Wilkinson (1991) defined community as including three elements: a territory or place, social organizations or institutions that provide regular interaction among residents, and social interaction on matters concerning common interest.

Chaskin (2001) notes that community is exemplified by a set of characteristics and operates through the agency of people to accomplish specific purposes. This important distinction stresses the sharing of common goals or interests as a component that creates community. Chaskin (2001) asserts that community characteristics include a sense of

community, a level of shared commitment among community members, the ability to solve problems, and access to resources.

An important additional dimension of community is the existence of external conditions, e.g., political, social, ecological, cultural, economic, in the larger society within which the community is nested. Description of these elements of community has been contributed by Jackson, et al. (1997), Kusel and Fortmann (1991), Chaskin (2001), and Flora, Flora, and Fey (2004). Conditions within these arenas provide opportunities for, and introduce constraints on, community capacity (Gibbon, Labonte & Laverack, 2002). Groups of people sharing a location are profoundly affected by these external conditions and may have little control over them.

The term community, when used in reference to this study, focuses on a group of people with shared interests in a community of place. Typically community leadership programs see their audience as the entire population living within a defined geographic area and sharing local services. This includes a municipality, but can also include others living within close proximity who share common local political, social, ecological, cultural, and economic interests and issues.

Defining Rural Community

Rural community has been defined in a variety of ways. Government and private organizations do not all share a common definition for *rural*. The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) notes that, generally, *rural* is an area designation of non-urban or nonmetropolitan areas. According to official U.S. Census Bureau definitions, rural areas comprise open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents. Urban areas comprise larger places and densely settled areas around them. In general, urbanized areas and urban clusters must have a core with a population density of 1,000 persons per square mile and may contain adjoining territory with at least 500 persons per square mile.

Rural is defined as areas of population less than that density. Computerized procedures and population density criteria are used to identify urban clusters of at least 2,500 but fewer than 50,000 persons (Cromartie, 2007).

This study explores a rural community as defined by the above rural population definition. Rural areas comprise open country and settlements with population areas of fewer than 2,500 persons and with a population density of fewer than 1,000 persons per square mile, or 500 persons per square mile adjacent to urban core areas. Computerized procedures and population density criteria are used to identify rural areas. It is important to distinguish however, that when citizens reference community, they are often more focused on the shared human relationships between people of an identified geographically or politically defined place rather than a strict interpretation of population guidelines.

Community Capital Framework

As noted earlier, an important dimension of understanding community is the existence of external conditions in the larger society within which the community is nested. The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004) defines both the community arena and the interactive context within which citizens experience community leadership. Recognizing that a community is a collection of individuals, most community leadership approaches focus on the individual and the individual assets they hold. The community capitals framework is given significant attention in this chapter because it provides an important connecting framework for linking individual leadership development investments with community level impacts.

Identifying capital is a way to define and quantify the resources and influence an individual holds in relationship to others. When defining the concept of capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) stated, "Capital is accumulated labor which, when appropriated on a private, i.e.,

exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (p. 15). Bourdieu (1986) argued that in their assertion, capital assets could be utilized to maintain power or assert power, and that social and cultural capitals could be quantified to some degree, in economic terms. While not asserting a direct equation of valuation, his conceptual framework of the application and valuation of capital is appropriate to understanding the influence potential of capital assets in a social setting.

An individual's capital, in essence, is the sum of the individual attributes that give a person credibility and influence within a social group. As noted earlier, the existence of political, social, ecological, cultural, and economic conditions in society contribute to understanding community. This concept of *conditions* or conceptual arenas helps to give a broad picture of the interacting dynamics that make up a functioning community. These identified arenas are also categories of commonly held community assets or capitals (Ferguson & Dickens, 1999; Green & Haines, 2008; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Flora, Flora and Fey (2004) detail a structure of community capitals that include seven primary fields of a functioning community called the community capitals framework. More than a collection of individual assets, the community capitals framework identifies those assets created or held collectively by the community. While an individual can hold capital, a community capital is best understood as an aggregate or collection of attributes that exist or emerge only at the collective community level. Individuals contribute to community capacity only when resources are dedicated to collective action focused on the community (Chaskin et al., 2001; Donoghue & Sturtevant, 2007; Emery & Flora, 2006). Kusel (1996) asserts that a community's capacity is dependent on various forms of community capital. Sociologist Cornelia Flora writes, "When considering a society or community, the defined group has resources available to them collectively, which are consumed,

held in reserve, or invested. When resources are invested to create new resources, they become

capital" (Flora, n.d). The seven areas of community capital identified in the Community Capitals

Framework (Figure 1) include built, natural, human, political, financial, social, and cultural.

These community capitals are interconnected and interdependent (Ahmed et al., 2004; C. Flora,

nd –a).
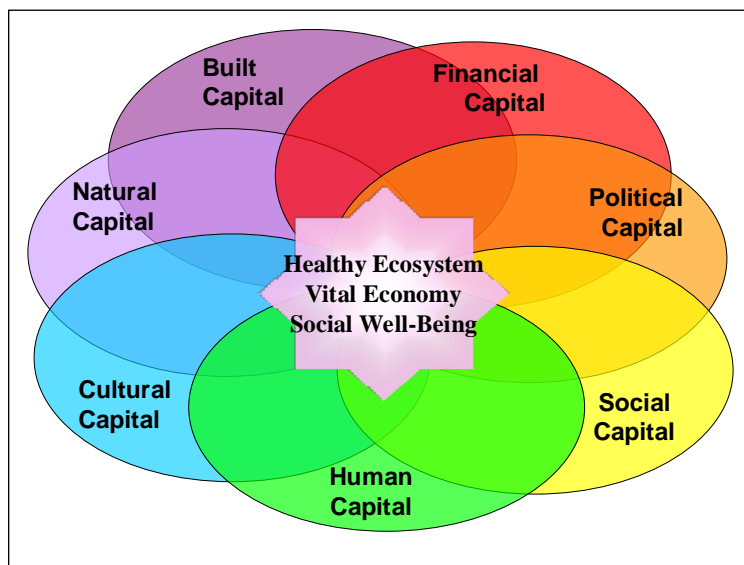
Figure 2.1 Community Capitals Framework (Source: Flora, C.B. (2006). [*Understanding Community Capitals PowerPoint presentation*] Unpublished raw data.

Effort invested to strengthen one area of community capital influences other capital areas

(Fey et al., 2006). Use of one capital can create additional capitals and increase their

productivity. Conversely, community capitals left unused can decrease. Capitals can be

transformed from one form to another (Fey et al., 2006). Physical attributes, economic assets,

and built infrastructure certainly vary by community and over time, but so will community

political, social, cultural, and human capitals. The community capitals framework allows a

categorization by which to identify and sort out the dynamics of action and interaction within a community development setting.

The capitals themselves can be divided into two types. *Foundational capitals* are those physically tangible resources that are present in the community. They include built, natural, and economic capitals. *Mobilizing capitals* activate and mobilize foundational capitals into productive use by the community. Mobilizing capitals include human, cultural, social, and political capitals (Donoghue & Sturtevant, 2007; Emery & Flora, 2006). While all capital areas are important, this study focus is primarily on the development of mobilizing capital, and only secondarily on the natural, built, or economic aspects of community development. The mobilizing capitals refer to the human action aspects of community development, while the foundational capitals tend to reflect the physical elements of community development. The mobilizing capitals, particularly social, human, and political capital, are most relevant to creating community agency. As residents and groups interact over issues of common importance, there emerges what has come to be known as community agency, or the capacity for local action and resiliency (Wilkinson, 1991; Luloff & Bridger, 2003; Brennen & Luloff, 2007; Brennen & Israel, 2008). Because cultural attitudes, social capital relationships, and human capital skills can all affect political capital assets, these mobilizing capitals are intricately intertwined and dynamic within the community field. Chaskin (2001) summarizes the literature with this definition, "Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community" (p. 7).

Collectively, these capitals affect a community's capacity for change. While each of the community capital areas are important to the sustained functioning of a community, the capitals

most directly impacted by community leadership programs are human, social, and political capital. These are the capital areas most important for research seeking to understand how citizens perceive their ability to participate in leadership and power sharing. Insights into changes in these capitals help to understand how civic leadership development efforts have permeated the culture and citizenry of a community that has adopted this philosophy of leadership.

Human capital, on an individual level, refers to the skills, education, and knowledge of an individual. On a community level, human capital includes the collective aggregate of individual capacity, training, human health, values, and knowledge (Flora, et al., 2004; Green & Haines, 2008). Human capital is used to develop and access resources and to develop the community (Chaskin et al, 2001; Flora & Flora, 2004). Becker (2002) describes human capital to include education of the workforce, knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets. Economists often use the term labor, consisting of the skills, abilities, education, and training workers possess and bring to their jobs. Building leadership skills is an important component of workforce development. Green and Haines (2008) affirm that "having an adequate, skilled, and trained workforce is a prerequisite for economic development today" (p. 85). Measurement of human capital at the community level may include tracking the increased use of the skills, knowledge and ability of local people (North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, 1999). Leadership skills are often considered an aspect of human capital (Emery & Flora, 2006; Green & Haines, 2008). When applied to community-building activities, leadership skill development is an investment in community through the expansion of human capital. Human capital investment should be considered not only knowledge transfer, but also skill and capacity building exercises to enhance

the participants' ability to work with others in a collaborative venture. This investment in human capital addresses the leadership's ability to "lead across differences," to focus on assets, to be inclusive and participatory, and to act proactively in shaping the future of the community or group (Becker, 1964; Flora et al., 2004; Emery & Flora, 2006). Leaders initiate, facilitate, and direct community development activities; advocate for community interests; and catalyze formation of groups and organizations to collaborate toward community objectives (Laverack, 2001).

Viewed at the individual level, leadership development expands individual capacity and self-efficacy. Human capital skill development supports the development of the individual and the capacity for expansion of social networks and trust relationships. Viewed from a broader community view, this human capital investment strengthens the individuals that participate in strong inter-organizational partnerships, which in turn, strengthen community. Speer and Joseph (1995) emphasize the shared impact of human capital investment and community development as they point out, "Perhaps most important is the understanding that a reciprocal relationship exists between development of power for community organizations and individual empowerment for organization members" (p. 739). The focus shifts from human capital to social capital when the focus of relationship development moves from individual skills to concentrating on access and involvement in the larger society.

Social capital research often is based on the identification and use of social relationships and ties that facilitate action in community (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002; Flora & Flora, 2008; Green & Haines, 2008; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1995; Temkin & Rohe, 1998). Social capital can be seen as the norms and networks that facilitate collective action (Savage, Isham, & McGory Klyza, 2005; Field, 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006). Schnieder

(2004) adds that social capital refers to the social relationships and patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and institutions to gain access to resources like social services, jobs, or government contracts. Relationships between individuals, informal groups, and organizations provide the context of trust and support that enable people to collaborate toward shared ends (Putnam, 1995). Social capital emphasizes the ability and willingness of community members to participate in actions directed to community interests (Davis Smith, 1998; J. Field & Hedges, 1984; Home Office, 1999), and the processes of engagement, i.e., individuals acting to assist the community and participating in community organizations, groups, and networks (Williams, 2004).

Bonding social capital refers to the close ties that build cohesion within groups. Bridging social capital are the loose ties between groups (Granovetter, 1973, 1985).

Linking social capital identifies capital that allows crossing connections between people and institutions at different parts of the power hierarchy (Schnieder, 2004; Flora and Flora). Both Kaufman (1959) and Wilkinson (1991) are careful to point out the distinction between development *within* the community and development *of* the community. Wilkinson (1991) differentiates between social fields and community fields, highlighting that a social field develops when actions take place within a particular sector, but may represent interests of a group rather than the entire community.

Laverack (2001) asserts that community social capital can be identified through a number of community characteristics including: resident participation in identification, analysis, and management of community issues; organizational structures that facilitate community gathering, interaction, and problem solution; multiple links across people and organizations; and links between the community and external resources. While conceptually valuable for framing and

understanding a dynamic concept, measuring both the form and function of social capital has proven to be a challenge to researchers (Dika & Singh, 2002; Schnieder, 2004).

Closely related to social capital, *Political capital* includes the ability of a citizen or a group to influence the distribution of community resources, including helping to set the agenda of what resources are available (Flora & Flora, 2008). While social connections may be a political capital asset, political capital has a focus more oriented to social influence. Political capital includes resources individuals use to influence policies in their interest, or it takes the form of structural political capital, which refers to attributes of the political system that shape participation in decision-making (Birner & Whittner, 2000). Political capital involves community power and power brokers, as well as the ability to influence the rules and regulations that affect citizens (Fey et al., 2006; Flora & Flora, 2004). Political capital also involves the capacity of people to express themselves and to participate as agents in their community (Aigner, Flora, & Hernandez, 2001).

Involvement and development of power relationships generate strong influences at many levels and deeply effect daily social interactions (Chaskin et al., 2001). Political capital also serves to connect community development with government resources and private investment (Turner, 1999). Community leadership programs can help citizens realize and strengthen political capital and power within their community. Power is discussed in depth later in this chapter, however, it is important to note that leadership development that expands a citizen's ability to access and assert power is an investment in human, social, and political capital.

These three mobilizing community capitals contribute to the social agency and ability of citizens to affect social, physical, environmental, economic, or cultural community change. The community capitals framework provides a conceptual context within which to reflect how civic

leadership is experienced within the community, and provides categories (human, social, and political) for reflection on how citizens perceive changes over time.

Community Field Theory/Development Models

Work on assessing personal capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Kretzmen and McNight, 1993; Sharp, 2001) as applied within the realm of community, has forwarded the concept of the community social field (Kaufman, 1959; Theodori, 2005; Wilkinson, 1970, 1972). When looked at on a collective field, individually held capital can be used to influence interactions and change (Sharp, 2001; Bourdieu, 1983). It is the status of those capital resources in array that contribute to the functional structure of society itself. Bourdieu (1983) described society as a field of power relationships with individuals vying to influence others. Bourdieu understood the community field not to be a flat contained surface, but rather a dynamic field of forces wherein positions are determined by the allocation of capitals to the various actors. He goes on to explain that the structure of the community field is defined at any given moment by the balance of power between social positions corresponding with a system of objective symbolic points and among the distributed capital. Bourdieu (1983) states, "the field is therefore a partially autonomous field of forces, but also a field of struggle for positions in it" (p. 312).

The community field perspective describes community as a dynamic plane of interaction between an individual and the community they inhabit. The field of social interaction is the realm within which a citizen interacts with others. Wilkinson (1991) notes that all local societies have distinct and diverse social fields or groups where residents act to achieve various self-interests and goals. Additional studies (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004; Sharp, 2001; Woolcock, 1998) have built on the understanding of the community field as a process of interrelated actions through which residents express their common interest in the local society. Bridger, Brennan,

and Luloff (2011) describe, "Seen from this angle, community is best thought of in dynamic terms; it represents a complex social, economic, and psychological entity reflective of a place, its people, and their myriad relationships" (p.88).

It is within the community field that individuals interact, organize, assert influence, and create change. Kaufman (1959) identifies that a key analytical element of local action is dependent on the groups of associations through which community action occurs. It is through the interactions within the community field and assertion of mobilizing capital that citizens can, or cannot, assert influence and motivate action for community change. While the community field cannot be directly measured, some researchers assert that the community field can be measured indirectly through past activities (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 1985; Martin & Wilkinson, 1984; Zekeri, Wilkinson, & Humphrey, 1994). Indirect measurement is based on the assumption that "A pattern of accomplishments in previous community efforts implies a network of associations among community leaders and others that can be activated to pursue particular local goals" (Martin & Wilkinson, 1984, p. 377).

The work in community field theory is important to this case study. Without a unifying perspective, all actions, events, and relationships within a community are like individual grains of sand. A grain of sand is only a grain of sand. Collectively, many grains of sand make a pile of sand. What characteristics make sand a beach? Likewise, an individual is an individual, and an event is only an event, not a community. A community field perspective provides a descriptive framework within which patterns can be detected and characteristics can be defined. A community field perspective and capitals approach defines the combinations of individuals, relationships, features, and activities that characterize community.

Wilkinson (1991) differentiates between social fields and community fields. A social field develops when actions take place within a particular sector. A community field develops when collective actions endeavor to address a community-wide issue. This distinction is important as Wilkinson (1991) asserts that the community field can only be developed through community action. Developing strong social fields within a community does not necessarily generate a strong community field. This point is of particular interest to inform my perspective during this case study. When listening to citizens describe their understanding of civic leadership, it is important to ask questions that help define if the leadership and investment is serving the entire community or a select subset or group within the community.

Community Development Philosophies

Due to the complexity and broad scope of community, community development has been approached and defined in a variety of contexts. Christianson, Fendley, and Robinson (1989) identify a variety of definitions of community development, with the essential meaning captured as, "A group of people in a locality initiating a social action process (i.e., a planned intervention) to change their economic, social, cultural and/or environmental situation" (p.14). Chaskin (2001) notes that community is exemplified by a set of characteristics and operates through the agency of people to accomplish specific purposes. Community characteristics include a sense of community, a level of commitment among community members, the ability to solve problems, and access to resources. Social agency is embedded in individuals, organizations, and networks. Importantly, he notes that the social agency needs be directed toward shared community objectives for community development to occur. Often community development work is thus characterized as the collective process of helping citizens identify and work toward those shared objectives.

In a categorization of approaches to community development work, Christenson, et al. (1989) identified three types of approaches: self-help, technical, and conflict. A self-help approach may involve a facilitator to support community groups coming together to identify their assets and design efforts and structure to advance local development. The focus of this approach is capacity building. Efforts promote enhancing the skills and assets of the people of the community and the mobilization of resources and efforts to help themselves. The technical approach to community development has a focus of expertise and resources that lies external to the community. This model typically relies on a consultant or expert who devises a strategy for the community and links to external resources to accomplish goals. The third model, the conflict approach, is more focused on the role of an external community developer who serves as an advocate to organize and enable community groups. This approach is more common when working with underrepresented or oppressed groups who are seeking voice for equal rights and demanding access to resources. These three perspectives differ in assumptions about the society and the individual. Crowfoot and Chesler (1976) for instance, emphasize the ideological assumptions related to the approaches. Typically, self-help approaches view the individual as capable, but suppressed. Technical assistance approaches often view a system-defined players and roles approach to development, while a conflict approach views individuals as oppressed victims of power imbalance.

Community leadership programs may use any one of these community development approach paradigms, or a combination. The fundamental assumptions on behalf of the community leadership program organizer has influence on the content and delivery of the community development program. Leadership programs that hold a self-help approach focus on education and capacity-building efforts to assist the citizen. Leadership programs that hold

technical assistance development assumptions may focus on getting the "right" people together

to share the relevant information and resources to the citizens to address the need. Leadership

programs holding assumptions about citizens as under-represented victims often focus on

personal and group empowerment or political organizing.

Community leadership programs provide a method of community organizing. When a

community leadership program is designed to encourage participation from a broad

representation of people from a community of place, the program may serve as a vehicle to

achieve inclusive community development goals. Leadership programs that are intended to build

capacity and involvement in community decision making are consistent with the community

intervention approach Rothman (1995) refers to as locality development. This is also consistent

with Christenson's (1989) self- help approach to community development.

In situations of more defined social inequality, a leadership program intended to build the

capacity of a specific subgroup may reflect what Rothman (1995) refers to as a social action

agenda. This type of program may have a primary focus of empowering individuals and

teaching communication and self-advocacy skills. This is consistent with Christenson's (1989)

conflict approach to community organizing.

Binswanger-Mkhize, de Regt, and Spector (2009) detail the changing approaches to

community development by the World Bank and other global community development

organizations. The report indicates that community development approaches since the 1950s

have generally shifted from centralized, expert-driven technical models, to consultant-driven

models focused on technological-fix approaches, to participatory approaches that center on

citizen efforts to drive community-based development efforts. In the early 21st century, widely

accepted community development approaches reflect a self-help focus that works to expand the

capacity of citizens to address their own issues and self-regulate their work. This philosophy is increasingly seen as "good practice" in community development as reflected by the International Community Development Society's "Principles of Good Practice" (http://www.comm-dev.org/), which describe good practice as actions that: "Promote active and representative participation toward enabling all community members to meaningfully influence the decisions that affect their lives" and "Work actively to enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community."

The ability of community members to work intentionally to enhance personal and collective capacity to respond to and influence change also is recognized as an element of community resilience (Colussi, 2000; Berkes & Seixas, 2005).

Community leadership development through the Kansas Leadership Center encourages use of a conceptual curriculum, which emphasizes the capacity development of the individual to work effectively with others. While the curriculum has not been developed to fit into any particular philosophy of community development, it could best be described as consistent with a self-help philosophy of community development.

Section 2: Literature Review of Civic Leadership and Community Power

Burns (1978) notes that "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomenon on earth" (p. 9). Initial research on leadership tended to focus on the characteristics of known leaders (e.g. Lord, et al., 1986; Stogdill, 1974). Collectively, this approach to defining leadership through personal attributes is often referred to as trait theory of leadership. Other leadership theorists (e.g. Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fleishman, 1973) began to explore the behavior of leadership, shifting the focus from individual characteristics to leadership behaviors. Studies around this behavioral approach identified that individuals may use differing leadership behaviors. The idea of styles of leadership arose from the behavioral leadership studies. Building on the idea of leadership as a behavior, researchers began to match types of behaviors with situational leadership needs (Blanchard, 1985). Situational leadership theory allowed the person in the leadership role some alternatives to match the most appropriate leadership to the needs of the situation. This theory was important to the beginning of leadership development programs, because this theory supported choices in leadership behavior, which is considered a knowledge base and skill that could be developed. As leadership theories began to examine the motivation of participants, (e.g., Path-Goal, Transactional Leadership, and Leader-Member Exchange theories) the focus shifted from leadership being determined by the attributes or actions of *the leader*, to the dynamics of relationship between leaders and followers. By redefining leadership as a relationship between the leader and follower (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993), new perspectives of leadership began to form. While many other popular approaches to leadership have been theorized, it is this insightful understanding of leadership as the dynamic

relationship between collaborators that undergirds current thought on public leadership. Burns (2004) explains,

> Leadership — the relations between leaders and followers and among followers — has at its affective core efficacy and self-efficacy, individual and collective, the feelings of deep self-confidence, hope and expectation that goals can be attained and problems solved through individual or collective leadership. Thus individual efficacy both strengthens and draws strength from collective efficacy in a virtuous circle (p. 224).

Much of the focus on leadership studies referenced thus far had an industrial or organizational driver and focus. Interestingly, extensive literature review on community leadership research reveals little to draw upon (Rost, 1993; Vandenberg, Fear & Thullen, 1988). The focus on civic leadership was forwarded with Rosts' (1993) theory of social change leadership. Rost identified three primary characteristics of social change leadership should include: 1) a vision and direction of intended change, 2) the collaborative efforts, knowledge, and resources of those involved, and 3) action on behalf of society, not action in pursuit of individual goals. The social change leadership theory has been influential to the furthering the concept of civic leadership.

The staff and consultants of the Kansas Leadership Center (identified as KLC in the quote below) have developed a more specific understanding of civic leadership for their work in Kansas. Alexander, et al. (2009) state:

> In order to succeed, KLC would need to develop a much more precise definition of civic leadership. This definition would provide the focus for its programmatic initiatives. Rather than adopt an existing model of leadership that might not be relevant to the Kansas context, KLC chose to develop its own theory and description of civic leadership

based on a thorough understanding of the civic challenges facing Kansans and the civic

culture — the norms and processes used to address civic challenges — of its towns, cities

and regions (p. 4).

In pursuit of this effort, the Kansas Leadership Center staff identified what they refer to

as the KLC Theory of Civic Leadership. It is described in the Kansas Leadership Center winter

2010 newsletter, *The Bulletin,* as:

> A profoundly different kind of civic leadership and civic culture is needed throughout our
>
> communities. Making progress on civic challenges requires courageous collaboration
>
> that must engage "usual" and "unusual" voices. The capacity to exercise leadership must
>
> come much more from personal credibility and skill rather than from positions of
>
> authority. Furthermore, civic leadership must be focused more on process of engagement
>
> rather than the content of the issue. Finally, this different type of leadership must be
>
> pervasive across our state if Kansans are to create truly healthy communities (p. 6).

Meissen (2010) defines civic leadership for the KLC efforts as: "acts of leadership in which

individuals attempt to enhance the common good of their community based on a perceived sense

of responsibility" (p. 83). It is noteworthy that civic leadership has not been clearly and

consistently defined in literature. The Kettering Foundation has shifted to using the term

"organic" in their work because of the varied meanings the words *public* and *civic* (Mathews,

2009). The Kansas Leadership Center approach to civic leadership had previously been

described as shared leadership when used in instruction in the Kansas Community Leadership

Initiative classes. Allen, Morton, and Li (2003) defined shared leadership as "the co-creation of

an environment by a group of individuals, organizations, and communities with the intent to

accomplish a common vision and collaborative goals" (p. 4). This definition captures the shared

responsibility and relationship development also important for effective civic leadership. The concept of civic leadership represents more than power sharing by authority figures, however, it encapsulates the idea of shared power by the people of the defined community acting in the interests of their community.

In spite of a vague definition of civic leadership, the actions and belief systems undergirding civic leadership are evident. The Kansas Leadership Center's approach to civic leadership development has a specific focus of including the *unusual* voices of a community. The *unusual* voices, according to the President and CEO of the Kansas Leadership Center, Ed O'Malley (2009) are "the silent and broad middle, as well as members of minority groups …[whom] tend to be unengaged, complacent, and apathetic – unwilling or unable to enter the polarizing fray" (p. 63).

In practice, this means expanding the leadership capacity of members of the community in an effort to expand the powerbase of a community through building political capital. Political capital refers to the access to power, access to organizations, connection to resources, and connections to power brokers (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004; Green & Haines, 2008). Political capital also refers to the ability of people to find their own voice and to engage in actions that contribute to the well-being of their community (Aigner et al., 2001). The development of political capital for citizens "is central to starting the process whereby quiescence is challenged, prevailing doctrines questioned, and local residents empowered" (Brennan & Israel, 2008. p. 88). In reference to facilitating civic leadership interventions, O'Malley (2009) writes, "Especially important to civic leadership, these individuals purposefully seek ways to engage an expansive and unusual group of citizens" (p. 14). He continues, "They [civic leadership practitioners]

realize diverse minds, reflective of the many factions in the broader community, devise stronger and more sustainable solutions than any one or two factions could on their own" (p. 14).

By expanding the citizen participation in leadership development opportunities, the civic leadership base is expanded to the entire population of the community. Participants in the community leadership program can be positioned where they have decision-making opportunities and choices in community direction, priorities, resource allocations, and shared goal attainment. Having voice and inclusion in community is a foundation of self-help community development practice. Littrell and Littrell (2006) summarize,

> Community development is rooted in basic democratic philosophy. All people have both the right and responsibility to create and recreate a community that enhances its members' collective for self-governance, self-determination and self-help. Community development occurs when people's collective capacity for self-direction is enhanced or increased (p. 53).

This leadership actualization comes through not only identifying who is to be involved, but also by purposefully considering how they will be involved. O'Malley (2009) asserts, "At the heart of this competency are two beliefs. First, leadership is about activity (interventions) not position (authority) and, second, effective interventions are effectively designed and delivered" (p. 14). By exploring personal attributes and not positional authority, Kansas Leadership Center programs support the development of personal credibility and influence. The fundamental assertion is that personal power can come from finding and asserting one's own voice, and not through being granted authority by others through a position of power. This approach is also consistent with Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) work, which focused on personal assets and defining community capacity as a set of assets that exist within and among a community's

members, local associations, and institutions. Doak and Kusel (1996) add that building personal capacity also nurtures the community environment wherein residents are able to identify their needs and goals.

This is an important first step in creating collaborative efforts. As indicated by Flora et al. (2004), "The key to building and maintaining political capital for disadvantaged groups is persistence and permanence. It is critical to organize, stay active, and form coalitions" (pp. 130-131). In addition to collaborative organizing, Fawcett et al. (1995) focus on collective action, defining community capacity as the community's ability to pursue its chosen purposes and course of action. Gaventa suggests that those without power must go through a process of "issue and action formulation" (1980, p. 24) and carry out the process of "mobilization of action on issues" to create power.   The identification of power, creation of power, and assertion of power is an important element of civic leadership.

Power in Relationships

The study of community power relationships is relatively new. Much of the defining literature on the subject has been developed in the last 80 years. A dominant paradigm of the world is to view power a comparative or competitive context. In this perspective, power is evident in its inequality and is most evident in contrast between two or more entities as "power over" or the use of power by one entity on another. Fairholm (1993) describes power in a definition consistent with this paradigm. Fairholm (1993) states, "Power is simply the individual capacity to gain your own aims in interrelationship with others, even in the face of their opposition" (p. 7). This definition implies that power exists only through the action or assertion of will. As Brungardt and Crawford (1999) point out, "Empowerment, even to the most liberal progressive leader, is still controlled by the top and done to those at the bottom" (p. 78). Perhaps

a more appropriate definition to understand power as it relates to civic leadership is: "the capacity to have effects on others or the potential to influence" (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995, p. 339). Power in this definition is better understood as "power with" others, and not "power over" others.

When defined in this way, power can be understood at an interpersonal level, and can also be understood when projected to a larger societal context. As Harry Boyte (2009) details when describing organic democracy, "organic politics is open ended, relational, and grounded in local knowledge and shared agreements accumulated through experiences over time. It generates power *to* and power *with* not only power *over*" (p. 3).

When power is thought of as the ability to influence others, it is consistent with the understanding of capital as sources of power (Bourdieu, 1986). Approaches to define and understand power may look to the symbols and resources of power and evidence of power in relationships (Fairholm, 1993; French & Raven, 1959; Pfeffer, 1992) or to capital assets (Bourdieu, 1977; Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993).

It is pertinent to this study to establish a background for both personal and community power because community leadership programs can draw attention to and strengthen citizen power by focusing on leadership through empowerment. If the citizen understands power as residing in "sources or forms" as indicated above, and understands that power is both relational and contextual, he or she will be able to consider which sources of power are relevant in the context of any given situation and relationship in order to help them participate in community leadership. By helping citizens to understand and interpret their own sources of power, educators can assist citizens to enhance their credibility and influence with others. Without this working understanding of power, it is possible that a citizen will remain neutral, or perhaps as a

self-perceived powerless victim of others that are more skilled in the use of power. With a stronger understanding of power dynamics, citizens are positioned to participate in shared power relationships in a social context.

Research on Community Power

The idea of using individual power to influence social change is not new (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004; Loeb, 2001). If individual power lies in sources of power relevant to interpersonal relationships, power in society can be viewed collectively as an aggregation of power sources (Blatner, Carroll, Daniels, & Walker, 2001; Hardina, 2006; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003; Speer & Hughey, 1995). The assertion that learning about power relationships may be the key to changing the power dynamics of a community has been well documented. C. Wright Mills (1958) referenced public disengagement in relation to community power and noted the public "… lose their will for decision because they do not possess the instruments for decision; they lose their sense of political belonging because they do not belong; they lose their political will because they see no way to realize it" (p. 40). The decline in civic participation noted by Putnam (2000) as well as lack of political participation reflects the disengagement of much of the American public. This disengagement is accompanied by the loss of individual power, social affiliation, and action. Because of the dynamic nature of power, however, this personal and social power can be regained. As noted by Flora, Flora & Fey (2004), community power allows both the individual and public to gain resources. In order to break this pattern of disengagement, citizens must be empowered to participate in the power sharing process. Gaventa (1980) asserts that the citizen must go through a process that includes issue and action formulation by which the citizen develops consciousness of the needs, possibilities, and strategies of challenge. Any individual can work to re-establish social networks and relationships to create new power

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alignments. Similarly, Galbraith (1983) asserted that social power is accessed only through organization, and that organizations hold power to the extent that members collectively pursue a common goal or purpose. Similarly, Brennan and Israel (2008) indicate that collective action strategies can create power, and that the broad and inclusive linkage of social fields can create social agency. Speer and Hughey (1995) note "a reciprocal relationship exists between the development of power for community organizations and individual empowerment for organization members" (p. 729).

This research helps to understand individual empowerment as it relates to power development, and points to power creation and assertion at the community level. Several competing theories have described how power is arranged at a community level. Typically, in the broadest context, the exercise of power falls into two camps: pluralism and elitism (Brennan & Israel, 2008; Dahl, 1961; Domhoff, 1986; Hunter, 1953; Israel & Beaulieu, 1990; Moffett & Freund, 2004; Waste, 1986), however, other adaptations of these theories have been forwarded.

The concept of elitism as a description of community power was made popular by C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* in 1956. Mills defined how a hierarchy of very few power holders control the agenda and make the important governing decisions. Mills argued that this hierarchical power structure was reflected from the national level down to the community level. Robert Dahl's, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961) is often referenced as a classic study that refuted Mills work to assert the concept of pluralism. Pluralism asserts that all individuals hold some degree of power, and while they may aggregate for causes, or have different access to institutional power and resources, that systems of competing interests, laws, rules, and differing priorities create working balances of power.

Max Weber described a power structure under the *ruling class* – a class of people with higher education, higher income, shared wealth through generations, and greater access to resources (Gane, 2005). This paradigm does not imply that a social class is actively governing a community, but that the economic and social priorities and policies are established by, maintained by, and skewed in favor of a distinct class of people. A variation on this structural understanding of community power includes the concept of the "growth machine" (Molotch, 1976). The "growth machine" concept identified a coalition of groups or individuals that pursue economic gain and work to encourage economic growth to capture the economic benefits. Examples of growth machine actors may include a combination of interests: developers; construction company owners; home insurance providers; real estate agents; owners of commercial or rental properties; bankers and business developers.

These community power theories reflect structural relationships that define the aggregation of power networks active in a community field. Each of these descriptive community-level power scenarios reflect the underlying principles of power or influence asserted between individuals within the community, and stem from access to resources or action chains that give individuals the credibility or ability to set policy, establish norms, or create action. These theories also represent the overall dynamics of how a citizen might experience power. Indications of citizens having and asserting power within the community field include how and if a citizen: has an active role in identifying and defining the issues important to the community; has a role in solution finding; has a role in decision making or access to/influence with decision makers; or has involvement in the actions taken to address community issues.

Studies of community power-sharing and success do reflect the importance of shared leadership for sustained community improvement. Much of the social and environmental change

philosophy reflects this approach (Blantner, et al. 2001; Bonnell & Koontz, 2007; Friere, 2000; Gaventa, 1980; Hardina, 2006; Stringer, Twyman, & Thomas, 2007). Broad citizen inclusion is also reflective of a pluralistic understanding of community power (Dahl, 1961). When a citizen asserts influence in community for the collective good, they are exercising civic leadership. Wojciechowski (2003) referred to the collective assertion of social power as "a cockroach revolution-one where millions are taking a tiny bite out of the problem until the combined effort topples great obstacles" (p. 75).

When access to social groupings are encouraged and supported within a community, networks and social relationships are strengthened. Inversely, through strategic application of influence in these social fields, power can be exerted to fracture relationships, discourage networking, or suppress access to resources, thus hindering community from emerging (Arcidiacono, Procentese & DiNapeli, 2007; Brennan & Israel, 2008; Luloff & Swanson, 1995). Power monopolized by a few individuals represents a restricted, elitist perspective forwarded by Hunter in *Community Power Structure* (1953). Community members who hold a predominance of capital resources (social, cultural, political, and economic) can control access to capital of other community members. Restrictive community power relationships have the effect of not only preventing community members from accessing power, but also inhibiting the emergence of new power and disabling access to forms of capital that emerge at the community level. Restricted access to power in a community may be preserved through a reproduction of existing leadership structure (Zacharakis and Flora, 2005). John Walton (1968) argues that a disruption of previous expectations of power can bring about new patterns of interdependence in a community. In other words, the introduction of the concept of civic leadership through a local community leadership program could result in dissatisfaction with the existing power

arrangement and may be predicted to create new arrangements of community power. He

continues by noting that while pluralistic power is often idealized, individually or broadly held

power may also result in conflicting deadlock within a community (Walton, 1968). Through the

exploration of citizen perspectives on civic leadership, this study shed light on the expectations

and lived experiences of local citizens in relation to civic agency and access to power.

The relationship between community power and perceptions of leadership are intricately

related. When citizens make the claim that there is a lack of community leadership, it seems that

they are looking externally for leadership and not considering their own role. In, *We have to*

Choose; Democracy and Deliberative Politics (2008), the Kettering Foundation points out that

community leadership may not reside in just one or a few individuals, but in the citizens

themselves. They write:

> In communities that are adept at solving or at least managing their problems, however, a
>
> great many people step forward. These are "leaderful" communities, meaning that
>
> everyone is expected to provide some initiative. The communities have redefined
>
> leadership by making it everybody's business, not just the business of a few, and by not
>
> equating leadership with positions of authority (p. 11).

Harwood (2004) reflects that typically, communities have viewed the concept of

leadership based on the assumptions of who holds authority for change and how change occurs

in a community. As noted earlier in this document, conventional approaches focus on an

individual, and typically on persons with capital assets or holding positions of authority.

Sulimani (2010) asserts that contrary to conventional approaches, the leaderful community

concept would support all citizens becoming responsible for taking initiative to address common

issues. The concept of leaderful communities (Mathews, 1996) supports the idea of a citizen-

centered approach to community change. Leaderful communities would ideally engage citizens to a higher degree in issue identification and community decision making. Locke and Schweiger (1990) report, "Research findings yield equivocal support for the thesis that participatory decision making necessarily leads to increased satisfaction and productivity, although the evidence for the former outcome is stronger than the evidence for the latter" (p. 197). While the Locke and Schweiger study was completed in a business environment, shared decision making has also reflected higher satisfaction with the process and results at the community level (Beierle & Cayford, 2002; Abelson & Gauvin, 2006). Recognizing that community power is not static, and that pluralistic power can be created and sustained through community members organizing and working together, civic leadership development programs can provide a venue for engaging citizens and changing community power systems.

Section 3: Civic Leadership Evaluation

This research study is not an evaluative study of a community leadership program. It is an investigation into how citizens experience civic leadership. It is important, however, to look briefly at literature surrounding leadership program and evaluation, especially leadership program evaluation strategies used in the community where this case study research takes place. This data can tell us about anticipated community-level impact of the case study community's leadership program.

Many leadership program evaluation tools are focused on ways to improve or enhance the leadership program. Efforts to evaluate program impact frequently begin with the personal benefits to the participants involved in the program. As indicated previously, leadership skills development is often considered an aspect of human capital (Green & Haines, 2008). Green and

Haines affirm, "having an adequate, skilled, and trained workforce is a prerequisite for economic development today" (2008, p. 85). Many community leadership development programs focus their impact assessment on individual skill development and assess impact or change brought on by the leadership program. Building individual leadership skills and capacities may require curriculum which addresses communication and listening, collaboration, skills for addressing conflict, opportunities to learn more about self, others, and effective methods for interacting with others (Walker, 2002). Outcomes of community leadership programs may include improved attitudes about community or the anticipation of returned investment in community improvement (Blevins, 2001). This investment in human capital addresses the leadership's ability to *lead across differences*, to focus on assets, to be inclusive and participatory, and to act proactively in shaping the future of the community or group (Becker, 1964; Emery & Flora, 2006; Flora, et al., 2004).

Viewed at the personal level, leadership development may build individual skills for working with others and self-efficacy. Viewed from a broader community view, this human capital investment strengthens the individuals that participate in strong inter-organizational partnerships, which in turn, is believed to strengthen community. Dorr (2011) notes that one of the most cited benefits of community leadership programs is increased citizen involvement in volunteer activities. Thus, it is projected that capacity building and skill development will support both the development of the individual and the potential for broader community investment.

Wituk and Jolley (2010) highlight that evaluation of the Kansas Leadership Center programs has four primary goals or purposes. Two of those primary evaluative goals most relevant to this study look at community impacts. The first evaluative goal is, "To

understand the contributions of civic leadership to community-level indicators, and, to understand the extent to which KLC programs achieve their intended outcomes" (p. 23). The second goal is assessed in part by answering the questions, "Do program participants change their social networks? Do program participants engage in civic leadership activities? And, do program participants understand and use KLC competencies?" (Wituk & Jolley, 2010, p. 23). While this research has not yet been reported, the results of the evaluative research would be relevant to this study.

Leadership development pedagogy often progresses from the individual, to interpersonal, then to community work. Evaluation of program outcomes has traditionally been focused on the individual or organizational gains (Pigg, 1999). The Kansas Leadership Center anticipates that strengthening personal skills will have positive repercussions at a community level. Wituk (2009) describes the thinking behind the Kansas Leadership Center's Theory of Change:

It is a theory in that the causal chain (often depicted as a flow chart) is based on a series of assumptions or hypotheses about how actions or activities are intended to influence other behaviors, attitudes, beliefs or a person's status (e.g., employment, health.) Through active participation [in KLC programs] participants are expected to (1) be inspired to take action; (2) connect with other participants, KLC, and others interested in community change; and (3) better understand the leadership competencies and how they apply to their own work and lives (p. 40).

Wituk continues by describing that it is believed that when the individual outcomes are achieved, organizational and community level (summative) evaluation will reflect an impact on a broader scale. Wituk states,

Participants are expected not just to learn, but take action in their local communities and

organizations. The "theory of change" continues by asserting that through collective

efforts of participants applying the leadership competencies in their communities and

organizations, greater social capital will be created (p. 40).

If the KLC theory is correct, observations and data from citizen interaction in this critical case

study should reflect a high level of awareness of civic leadership and an elevated level of

involvement and engagement in community projects, issues, and organizations.

A frequently cited benefit to attending a community leadership program reported by

alumni was increased networking (Dorr, 2011). Leadership programs do provide a structure for

community networking. Participants come together to meet others and to learn about the

services and people of their community. Programs that facilitate relationship building or design

activities that support the building of networks and trust necessary for successful collaborative

community projects can build social capital.

Strengthening relationships in a leadership program may strengthen bonding social

capital (Flora et al., 2004). Bonding social capital refers to those close redundant ties that build

community cohesion, and can occur for participants involved in the shared experiences and

relationship building. This new networking can serve as a bonding social capital experience, but

also can expand organizational connections and cross-community networks that build bridging

social capital. Bridging capital allows for inter-organizational collaboration and shared

investment in common community goals (Burt, 1995; Flora et al., 2004). Bridging social capital

involves loose ties that bridge among organizations and communities (Narayan, 1999;

Granovetter, 1973 & 1985). Leadership programs that purposefully design experiences to build

social capital should reflect a heightened level of trust and commitment; deeper ownership and

investment in community goals and organizations; and increased collaboration. Just hosting the program, however, does not guarantee these outcomes. An assumption that underlies many evaluation efforts is that cause and effect relationships exist between program participation in leadership programs and reports of changes in attitudes, knowledge, and professional practice. In a research study by Van De Valk and Constas (2011), however, using critical cause and effect evaluation filtering guidelines to test relationship between leadership development and social capital development, 4,800 potential studies were trimmed to just seven that met their methodological vigor. Further, their evaluation of those meeting the criteria did not show a clear indication of change in social capital due to involvement in a leadership program.

Section 4: Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter is an important foundation to better understand civic leadership and how it is experienced in community. The community field theory and the community capitals framework provide a conceptual context within which the dynamics of relationships and power can be better understood. These conceptual constructs of community are valuable to for a couple of reasons. First, it allows the citizen or community developer to refine and narrow the potentially overwhelming number of aspects of community. The community capitals framework creates categories or arena in which efforts can be focused. The second aspect of the community capitals model that makes it valuable to this study is that it includes the human and mobilizing aspects of community capital, and not only the physical and economic elements. Because research around the mobilizing capitals includes the development of capacity of citizens, this is entirely relevant and important as a framework from which to examine how citizens experience civic leadership.

The community field theory describes the social arena as a dynamic grid of interaction. While that may sound ambiguous, the theory provides a framework for a researcher to visualize and conceptualize what otherwise would only represent an assortment of singular interactions. Thinking of the community field as a plane of interactions through time, it is possible to conceptualize events and interactions collectively, and consider relationships between the actors. This study draws on the concept of the community field in the compilation and reporting of data. Civic leadership is characterized within the context of the interactive dynamics of human, social, and political capital within the social and community fields.

The review of common community development approaches also lends background to this study. Philosophical attitudes held by the researcher or community developer regarding the role that citizens play in community development efforts is entirely relevant to the idea of civic leadership. A "technical fix" or expert approach to resolving the needs of a community does not honor or respect the value of building citizen capacity for civic leadership.

The review of literature on leadership is important and relevant to this study. There needs to be a clear distinction between civic leadership and earlier concepts and expectations of leadership by ancestry, authority, or position. Research in civic leadership is limited. Very little published research clearly links cause and effect of leadership development with community capacity building (Van De Valk & Constas, 2011). Thus, for this investigation, no assumptions or anticipations can be made regarding assumed elevated levels of social, political, or even human capital over time in the community. Further, if changes have occurred, no assumptions should be made that they were caused through the work of the local leadership development program.

As mentioned earlier, research of community-level assessment of civic leadership remains sparse. An online Academic OneFile database key word search for the term *civic leadership*, resulted in six related articles. While a search of ProQuest and the UMI Libraries Interdisciplinary Dissertations and Theses Database resulted in 424 results for *civic* and *leadership*, when refined to the key words of *civic* and *leadership* and *case study*, the results dropped to 63. Many of these studies were linked to schools, student behavior, or institutional based studies. When the terms *civic leadership* and *community* and *case study* were searched, six results appeared. When *shared power* was added, the search indicated no matches. Omitting the term *case study* brought the results back up to one.

Related research (as detailed earlier in this chapter) does exist in the areas of community development, social and political capital, and community power, though few studies have pulled these areas together to explore them within the community context. Current research that deserves mention is a study by Pigg, Gasteyer, Martin, Cho Yeon, Apalayah, and Keating (in process). This work uses mixed methods to gather information from six states to determine the influence of community-based leadership education programs aimed at increasing the capacity of local citizens for civic engagement. This work, when published, has potential to strongly impact the strategies and effectiveness of community leadership development programs.

Much of the literature has focused on the area of social capital assessment. While there are descriptions of what civic leadership should be, documented research that characterizes civic leadership experiences in a community are limited.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

This study examines citizen experiences of civic leadership in a rural Kansas community document how citizens experience and understand civic leadership. Civic leadership includes the citizen's understanding of his or her own access to leadership and power. The study is an important investigation of citizen perceptions about individual sense of agency, or the ability to engage in and create positive change. This chapter describes the methods to be used in this research. As with others, this chapter is divided into sections. The sections will address: (1) research question; (2) A case study; (3) research site; (4) role of the researcher; (5) methods of data collection; and (6) method of data analysis.

Section 1: Research Question

The overarching question driving this investigation is: "*How do citizens experience civic leadership in a Midwestern rural community?*" This study collects and analyzes data that encourages a deeper understanding of how citizens perceive their ability to participate in leadership and civic power sharing. Through rich interviews and interaction within the case community, this research seeks a better understanding of how civic leadership has permeated the culture and citizenry of a community that has adopted a philosophy of shared leadership. Key questions in this research include:

- *How do citizens understand civic leadership?*

- *How are citizens involved with civic leadership in this rural community?*

- *How do citizens perceive their ability to participate in community change?*

- *How do citizens perceive community changes in civic leadership over time?*

These guiding questions will be investigated through individual interviews, focus group interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts including documents and archival records.

Section 2: A Case Study

For this study, a qualitative case study was selected to allow the researcher to understand community members' perspectives of civic leadership. Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasize that qualitative methods can be used to discover and understand what lies behind a phenomenon, or to gain a novel and fresh slant on things. They indicate that qualitative research provides a different type of data, and state, "Qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 19). The detailed data gathered through qualitative methods are an important asset to this study. In this investigation into individual experiences with civic leadership and expression of agency, interactive research methods needed to be identified that would allow for deep exploration and concept clarification. A research method needed to be identified that would be able to deeply investigate citizen perceptions and gather data on the broader community context. In addition, the research methods must facilitate documentation of community level interactions and reflect changes in citizen perceptions and involvement over time. Reporting of this data requires a description of civic leadership experience, which can aid the reader in drawing his or her own conclusions and connect with their own work and experiences. For these reasons, qualitative methods are best suited to capture and convey the data of this study.

The term "case study" has been used in a variety of contexts. Researchers have referred to case study as both the unit of study (the case) and the product of this type of investigation. Yin (2008) refers to case study as a research process, while Stake (2005) refers to case study as

the unit of study. Wolcott (1992) sees a case study as "an end-product of field-oriented research" (p. 36) rather than a strategy or method. These differing perspectives seem initially contradictory, but may be describing different aspects of the same thing. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). Merriam goes on to describe the case study as "a search for meaning and understanding whereby the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, with the end product being richly descriptive" (p. 40). Merriam's description of case study methods reframes the study as defined by the parameters or boundaries of the study. The definition is inclusive of the methods utilized and defines the research outcomes or product. Likewise, Creswell (2007) offers this helpful description of case study, case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes" (p. 73, emphasis in original).

Creswells' description is consistent with Stake (2005) who suggests the case study is less of a methodological choice than a choice of what is to be studied. Likewise, Smith (1978) emphasizes the *what* is the bounded system, a unit around which there is boundaries. In this case study, the individuals that reside within the defined community area comprise the *bounded system* being researched, while the phenomena being researched is their understanding of civic leadership.

Merriam (2009) notes that, "The decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (p. 42). Yin (2008, p. 13) suggests

that for how and why questions the case study has a distinct advantage. Case study research

provides an avenue of investigation different from experimental design. Bromley (1986) writes,

> … case studies, by definition, get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can,
> partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to
> subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires), whereas experiments and surveys
> often use convenient derivative data, e.g. test results, official records. Also, case studies
> tend to spread the net for evidence widely, whereas experiments and surveys usually have
> a narrow focus (p. 23).

Case studies have been criticized for their limitations of methodological rigor and

generalizability. As Hamel (1993) notes, "the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of

representativeness … and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the

empirical materials that give rise to this study" (p. 23). There are, however, research methods

that can be implemented to address these concerns. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that

trustworthiness can be strengthened with key attention to the research process to address the

issues of transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility.

The representativeness of a case study is a question of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) are

terming *transferability*. Generalizing from the results of one community study is problematic.

Any community-based research will be limited in its role to serve as the golden standard of

research that can be applied to any other community. Community development practitioners

joke, "If you know one community, you know one community." This statement reflects that

each community has a unique history, situation, and existing dynamics of relationships between

the citizens within the community. Due to the myriad of variables that exist within each defined

community, no two are the same. This, however, does not mean that the information gleaned

from a community study is not valuable. Trustworthiness is strengthened if the methodology and

reporting truly allow the reader to *know one community*. Giddens (1984) argues, "Research

which is geared primarily to hermeneutic problems may be of generalized importance in so far as

it serves to elucidate the nature of agent's knowledgeability, and thereby their reasons for action,

across a wide range of action-contexts" (p. 328). He asserts that these pieces of information,

when looked at collectively, can justifiably be transferred due to the typicality of results. While

the data and findings will, inevitably be unique to the community studied, the data and findings

will contribute to a deeper understanding of a situation, which can be compared with other

studies and may contribute to future learning.

Another element of this study that supports the transferability of findings will be a thick

description based on detailed field and research process notes. Hamels' (1993) criticism of "lack

of rigor in collection, construction and analysis of materials" can be addressed by what Anfara,

Brown, and Mangione (2002) refer to as analytic openness. They define rigor consistently with

Denzin (1978) as "the attempt to make data and explanatory schemes as pubic and replicable as

possible" (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 28). While recognizing that case studies are not replicable in

the classical science sense, Anfara et al.(2002) argue that thorough and transparent detailing of

research methods and conclusions support the rigor and defensibility of qualitative research

work.

This research will employ three techniques to assure consistency or dependability of this

study. First, by ensuring the same questions are asked in both focus group and individual

interviews, the overlap of methodology will allow consistency of data gathering. Next, through

contrasting and comparing data responses between the various data collection techniques, I will

be able to confirm themes through the triangulation of data. And finally, the process will be

detailed to a degree that it could be repeated. A thick documentation of the process should allow a researcher to follow the study path and reproduce it. While qualitative research is not replicable in the sense that another researcher could duplicate the results, thick description does support research dependability by exposing the details of the research and researchers thought process.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that credibility is a naturalistic term that refers to the methodology used to ensure what is conventionally referred to as internal validity. In this study, several techniques will be used to enhance credibility. First, data will be collected and reviewed from multiple sources. This allows cross-checking of data and themes. Second, Krueger (1998) identifies the data analysis techniques of being systematic and verifiable as two critical ingredients of qualitative analysis. In this study, a systematic line of questioning to both the personal interviews and focus groups will provide comparative texts for analysis. This internal consistency of questioning allows for fair comparisons of data. Citizen perceptions from focus group conversations and interviews will be compared and reviewed. In addition, it will be compared in context of extraneous data, including news reports, community demographics, and historical documentation of community changes. In addition, credibility will also be sought through member checking. Interviewees and focus group participants will be allowed an opportunity to review and affirm or refute the summary documents and inferences made from their study session.

This study will be undertaken in order to provide insight into an often talked about, but little understood phenomena of civic leadership. It is the search for insight and discovery that makes a case study framework ideal for this research. The individuals that reside within this defined community area comprise the bounded system being researched, while the phenomena

being researched is their understanding of civic leadership. The investigation of how citizens experience civic leadership is best served by a qualitative approach to research that is open and interpretive.

There are, admittedly, limitations to a case study of this type. There is not an implication that the participation in, or understanding of civic leadership portrayed by this community will be representative of other communities with similar civic leadership development programs. The case study format is not designed to provide cause and effect evidence of leadership program effectiveness. The study will, however present a case at a level of detail that will contribute to the knowledge base of exploration and understanding of civic leadership, and provide an insightful investigation into perspectives on civic power.

Section 3: Research Site

The title of this proposal, "How citizens experience civic leadership in a Midwestern rural community," begins to define the field of potential communities to participate in this study. Selection criteria for a purposeful study community include geography (Midwest), size of community (rural designation), and the requirement that the community has had several years of leadership programming that encourages civic leadership. The community will be called Wilhelm. The names of all references to the community, and organizations that are distinct to this community or carry the community name have been altered.

This study takes place in the state of Kansas, in the heart of the Midwestern United States. The term community, when used in reference to this study, focuses on a group of people with shared interests in a community of place. This community includes a municipality, but is not exclusive of others living within close proximity that share common local political, social,

ecological, cultural, and economic interests and issues. Addresses of participants were not

secured or confirmed in this study. Key informants in this study were all participants in the

programs, events, and interests of the community of Wilhelm.

Defining *rural* also can be complicated. Government agencies and private organizations

do not share a common definition for rural. The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) notes that, generally, rural is an area

designation of non-urban or nonmetropolitan areas. According to official U.S. Census Bureau

definitions, rural areas comprise open country and settlements *outside* of census places with a

population greater than or equal to 50,000 people (see Figure 1.2; definition 3). Urban areas

comprise larger population densities and densely settled areas around them. In general,

urbanized areas and urban clusters must have a core with a population density of 1,000 persons

per square mile and may contain adjoining territory with at least 500 persons per square mile.

Rural is defined as areas of population fewer than the above described density. Computerized

procedures and population density criteria are used to identify urban clusters of at least 2,500 but

less than 50,000 persons (Cromartie & Bucholz, 2007).
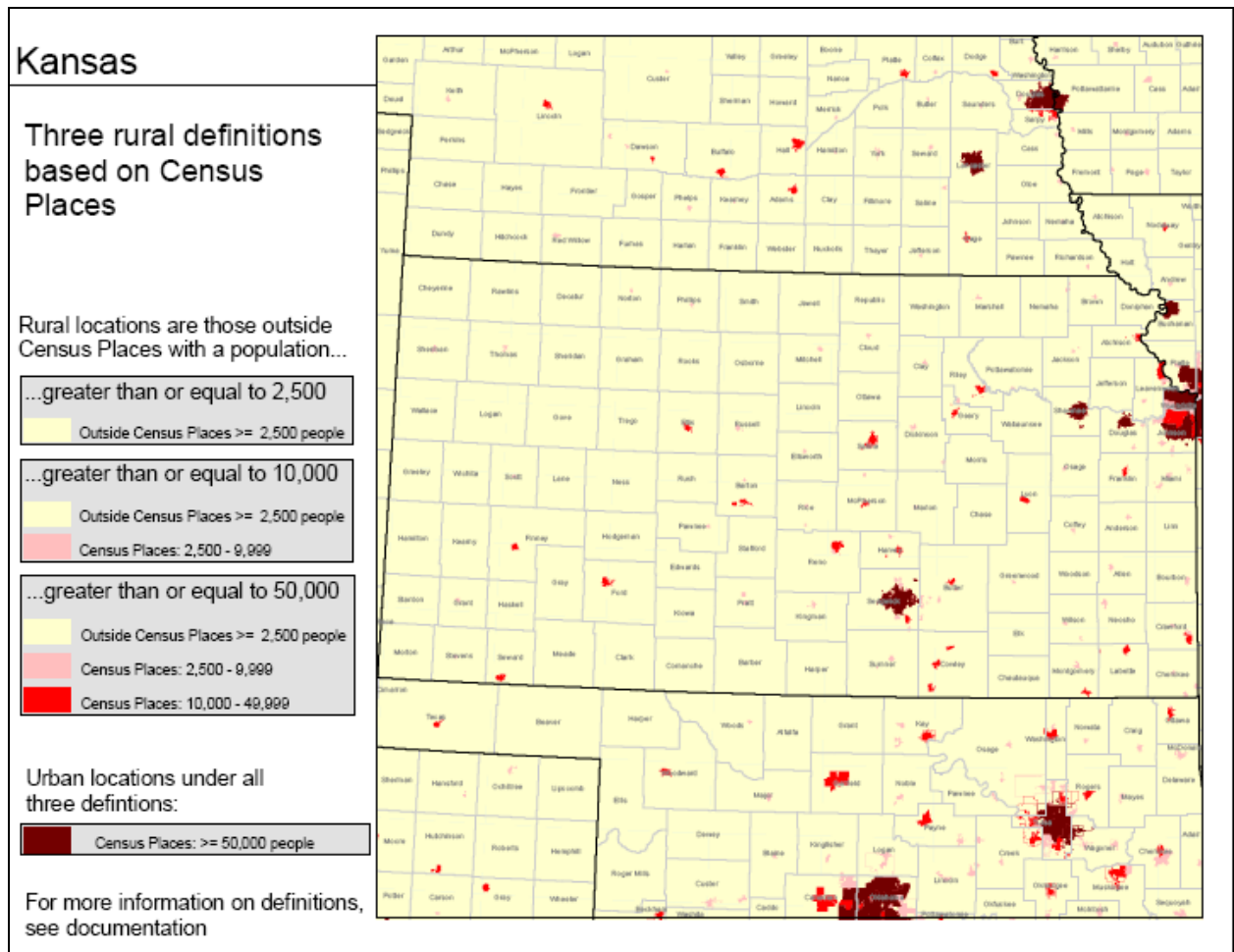
Figure 3.1 Defining Rural: Kansas Population Density Map. Source: Cromartie, J. & Bucholz, S. (2007) EDA/USDA Data – Definitions

For the purpose of this study, I follow this distinction of urban and rural areas based on definition three in Figure 3.1, which makes the distinction of rural as outside of census places greater than or equal to a population of 50,000 people. The community of Wilhelm meets this rural criterion. This is the *bounded system* for the case study.

Qualitative case studies do not only need to rely on meta-analysis to be meaningful (Creswell, 2007). This case study is what Stake (2005) has identified as an instrumental case study. That is to say, the study is "examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw

a generalization" (Stake 2005, p. 437). Flyvbjerg (2004) asserts that insight can be gained from individual case studies that reflect a unique situation or are purposefully selected to test a theory. Through the selection of an extreme or deviant case, information can be gained through an investigation of a specific situation. Flyvbjerg (2004) advises that, "when looking for critical cases, it is a good idea to look for either most likely or least likely cases, that is, cases that are likely to either clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions and hypotheses" (p. 426). The community selected for this study is not a random selection, but rather, a purposeful case selection. While this study on civic leadership does not test a theory, Flyvbjergs' case selection concept supports this proposal as significant due to its uniqueness.

This study seeks to explore a rural community which reflects exemplary civic leadership. In Kansas, the identification of a community that meets those criteria is best found through the leading organization that has invested in statewide efforts to encourage civic leadership programming. The Kansas Health Foundation, and more recently, an organization established by the Health Foundation, the Kansas Leadership Center, has invested in training and support of civic leadership in Kansas communities. The Kansas Health Foundation began investing in communities through an effort called the Kansas Community Leadership Initiative (KCLI) by training local community leadership coordinators in a curriculum with a broad, civic engagement philosophy. This civic engagement philosophy is characterized by a clear move away from a leadership curriculum agenda which focused primarily community information and networking with the community power social networks. The civic engagement curriculum focused on leadership skill development, shared leadership, and had an express mandate of *engaging unusual voices* in community needs assessment, problem solving, and decision making. Many of these communities also received funding from the foundation to support and sustain local

leadership programming. To begin the search for a study location for this study, I approached the Kansas Leadership Center for a list of "Great example" communities that had gone through the Leadership Initiative and have embraced and successfully implemented efforts to expand civic leadership locally. A list of ten community names was solicited from the Kansas Leadership Center which: (1) met the rural criteria, (2) represented examples of communities successful in their civic leadership development efforts, and (3) had implemented at least five years of civic leadership development programming. Based on this list of potential candidate communities, Wilhelm was selected as a community that meets the population criteria for definition as rural, has been advocating civic leadership for a period of more than 10 years, and was located within 100 miles of the origin of research. This was important for access reasons due to research resource constraints.

Section 4: Role of the Researcher

Every researcher has bias. As a researcher, it is imperative that actions be taken to openly identify and mitigate bias. Transparency in research depends on the researcher's ability to lay bare personal bias to allow the reader to understand the researcher's perspective in context to the study. Full transparency requires the sharing of the researcher's ontological and axiological perspectives and assumptions.

A researchers' ontological framework relates to their perspective on the nature of reality and its characteristics. Creswell (2007) emphasizes that researchers and participants involved in studies may embrace different realities. It is the researcher's role to seek to understand and honestly reflect those different realities when reporting qualitative research. The data from this study represents citizens' personal and unique perspectives on civic leadership and illustrations

of how they interact within the community field. Each data point represented by the interviewee

or editor of written physical artifacts represents a perspective, a subjective view of reality. A

challenge that accompanies embracing individual realities is the implication that research will

not be complete until every perspective is gathered. Limitations of time, resources, and a

dynamic subject base make comprehensive data collection unrealistic if not impossible to

achieve. To address this, one must be attentive to the potential social field networks of the

participants. By comparing the lists of participant referrals in this study, it is possible to avoid

staying within a tight social network of connections. For example, this study avoided

interviewing only leadership program graduates, chamber of council members, or a specific

demographic. By seeking persons outside of tight social networks or organizations and others

who are not as integrated in dominant social networks, the study strives to capture and fairly

represent the diverse realities of the citizen experience of civic leadership in this community. In

addition, transparency is supported by the use of direct quotations from participants in reporting.

Undeniably, every researcher holds a set of values that shape the interpretation of data.

Disclosure of the researchers' axiological assumptions is also important to the integrity of the

study. Influenced by a background in adult education and community development, I bring a

unique philosophical paradigm and value assumptions to this research. I believe that the social

community can be strengthened when citizens have opportunities to be actively and respectfully

involved in the pursuit of shared outcomes. I believe that the constructive involvement of

citizens in community activities can contribute to the development of citizen agency, which is

valuable to the sustainability and health of the relationships that shape how citizens experience

community. The concept of civic leadership assumes openness to citizen participation by voice

and action in public concerns. Authentic participation requires some degree of citizen power. I

perceive power as value neutral. While power can be asserted with personal or socially constructive or destructive intent, it is not intrinsically value burdened. Having access to power is important, however. It may be true that a theoretically equally balanced individual power dynamic is idealistic and unsustainable. However, the ideology of civic leadership strives to create a social dynamic that continually allows opportunities for people to act collectively for positive social change. Civic leadership calls for social engagement, shared voice in decision-making, and equal opportunity. When analyzing the data and writing the report, these values must be made explicit.

I recognize that my status as a representative of Kansas State University holds influence the relationship between the researcher and the informant. As a researcher, I sought to lessen the distance between the community and myself in order to gain a better epistemological perspective. In addition to scheduled interviews, I spent time in the community seeking to build relationships with citizens. In order to gain familiarity within the community, I attended public events, meetings by invitation, and spent time in public establishments. I believe that a physical presence contributes both to my deeper understanding of the workings of the community as well as enhanced public familiarity, which helped to build trust and recognition by interviewees.

Having spent 25 years in professional positions that involved volunteer recruitment and supervision, I have developed a social constructivist perspective of community development. I have seen how personal investment in efforts can create a strong sense of responsibility and ownership in project outcomes. I am cognizant that the participants' investment in decision-making, and execution of any given effort has a lasting value of creating a sense of responsibility and thus, creates longer-term overall sustainability of the effort or project. I have also seen that broad-based participation does not always equate to participant satisfaction. Broad involvement

of citizens can invite gridlock and indecision, or can lead to a reduced sense of individual value. Therefore, public or volunteer participation is only a part of the equation of successful community change and civic leadership.

This research study is not seeking to predict future actions. It does however, have assumptions on how civic leadership may be represented at the community level. Civic leadership, by most descriptions, should represent shared power, involvement in community decisions, and investment in the actions and resources needed to bring about community action. This study looks for evidence of the above, and seeks to understand how this shared leadership is lived and understood within the community. This research must tease out and explore the realization that perspectives are constructed by the participants. As a researcher, I recognize my role of sense making is both to transparently report the understanding others have about the world, and make any conclusions I draw to be as clear and openly evident as possible. Through thorough reflection and analysis I strive to communicate the context and situation faithfully to others who are interested in better understanding civic leadership within a community context so they may draw conclusions. A thick description of research, combined with the raw data and description of collection techniques and process notes should support the data as distinct from the researcher's interpretations. This methodology should support the confirmability of the data.

Section 5: Methods of Data Collection

This case study utilized data collection approaches of (1) individual interviews, (2) focus group interviews, (3) observation, and (4) physical artifacts. The data collection methods were selected for their capacity to generate rich data from the defined population living within the sample community. The variety of data collection methods provided ample data to understand

civic leadership in this community. The methods also provided unique independent data sources which allowed for comparative interpretation. Research time in the community was not limited to scheduled intervals and included both week-ends and week days. Along with arranged interviews and visits, un-structured community visits allowed me to walk Main Street, visit stores, restaurants, coffee houses, and public buildings. These visits included time at a local car show, at a major community festival, and attending community events. In total, interaction was made over a five month period.

The research approaches are intended to seek a variety of perspectives from the community. Perspectives were sought that included government, business professionals, and organizational leadership. I also sought perspectives of those that might not have as strong of a voice in the community. To identify what those "quieter voices" might be, I looked to organizations that served the needy and to individuals who may have a differing perspective from the dominant demographics of the community.

Individual Interviews

This research requires a method of data collection that allows for follow-up clarification and elaboration of perspectives by the subject. Personal informant interviews allow for in-depth dialogue and provide the best method of research to understand personal perspectives on civic leadership. A guided interview method as defined by Lichtman (2006) provided a consistent format of questioning. The interview methods involve a series of questions that lead the interview to successively deeper levels of information and insight. The approach to interviewing is flexible enough to allow follow-up inquiry to check understanding and the ability to investigate new and unexpected related lines of conversation. An interview process guide detailing the process and questions is included in Appendix B of this document.

The guided interviews were primarily held face-to-face, with one phone interview. Each interview was audio recorded. In addition, field notes detailed location, setting of the interview, and any environmental conditions that contribute to full representation of the situation.

Connecting with subjects for interviews was approached with a purposeful intent to reach individuals that could provide a broad perspective of the community, and also to make contacts with persons not only in positional leadership.

In addition to structured interviews, unstructured interviews also provide important context about the background, or case environment. Unstructured interviews are spontaneous interviews to seek a citizen-on-the-street perspective. These unplanned conversations include interactions with persons of interest to the researcher relevant to this research.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews produce large amounts of data in a short period of time. Morgan (1998) notes, "… focus groups draw on three of the fundamental strengths that are shared by all qualitative methods: (1) exploration and discovery, (2) context and depth, and (3) interpretation" (p. 12). Morgan goes on to say the most obvious difference between individual and group interviews is the amount of information that they provide about each interviewee. During the discussions in a focus group, it is possible to learn a great deal about the range of experiences and opinions in the group. The focus group format provides an opportunity for participants to share and compare experiences and perceptions. It does not, however, give the research the same level of deep insight about each specific subject as individual interviews allow. It is for this reason that this research project will use both focus group interviews and individual interviews to collect data.

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Three focus group interviews were conducted in the community to gather data on citizen experiences with civic leadership. Each focus group used a facilitated dialogue as detailed in the facilitator's guide to conducting the focus group included in Appendix A. Using a timeline as a visual reference, participants in the focus group identified significant community change events and their perceptions on civic involvement. The process of identifying both individual guided interview and focus group interview participants is detailed below.

Interview and Focus Group Participant Identification

The first interview contact for this research was scheduled with an elected city official. An initial contact was made by phone followed with an email introducing the project and requesting an interview. This first contact with local government was important for several reasons. First, it provided valuable perspectives of the local elected leadership on the levels of citizen engagement and involvement. Civic leadership activities can be promoted and encouraged through local government, ignored by local government, or even purposefully suppressed by elected leaders. This interview was important to better understand the local government perspectives on citizen involvement. Second, the contact was important to let local government be the first to know of this community-based research. While the study does not require formal permission from local officials, it was respectful to share my intentions for community research with the city office. This first contact introduced the research intentions to the city government to establish credibility for the case study and sought community connections and referrals. This contact is also important for the community perspective it provides. While organizations and businesses typically are focused on organizational advancement, local government has a purpose of addressing public, community issues. Not only did an interview at

this level give important insight on community level priorities, it also was an important way to gain a roadmap and introduction to the broad diversity of community stakeholders.

The second contact in the community was with a local extension agent from K-State Research and Extension. Due to previous professional interaction with this individual, I knew that she had served the county and community for 26 years. Working with people across the county through the years made her a rich information resource about how things get done in the community. She was also someone who could identify and put me in contact with other important community contacts. Like the first interview, this interview was selected because of the level of perspective it offered on community events and because the key informant had broad community connections. I was able to initiate the interview with a phone call and establish an interview.

An initial interview contact was also made with the director of the local Chamber of Commerce. This contact also offered several important avenues of insight on the community. First, the chamber was a key coordinating entity for community business development efforts, and had strong connections with area business leadership. Visiting with the chamber director was a move similar to interviewing an elected city official; it showed respect and recognition of the local program as a "first-stop" interview to learn about the community. Second, the Chamber of Commerce is responsible for coordinating the community leadership development program. The chamber director had 25 years of history with the leadership development program in the community, and was a key driver of the leadership development programming shifts in 2000 when the program changed from an emphasis on networking to a higher emphasis on leadership skills development. As with the first two contacts, the perspective of the chamber director on

community changes was important. Contact with the chamber director was done by phone and email.

The first three scheduled interviews provided distinct perspectives on the community, and provided connections with others in the community. After each interview, I asked for the names of others that would provide a valuable perspective to this research to participate in focus group interviews. The snow-ball method of identifying other research participants utilizes local knowledge of networks and provides a familiar local connection for introduction to new research subjects. Limitations of following this design include the potential of subjects being identified through existing community structures providing a replication of perspectives. To alleviate this limitation, I also conducted causal or unstructured interviews with community residents. These spontaneous interviews were intended to seek a "citizen on the street perspective."

From these first primary contacts, I was able to collect additional names of individuals for interview and focus group participation. The first interview with the elected city official resulted in a list of names of referral. This list of names shared by the Wilhelm city official led to three individual interviews and one focus group participant.

An unscheduled interview was conducted involving a city employee. No additional references were provided by that interviewee. A third interview with the K-State Research and Extension gent provided an additional list of candidate names for interviews. This list of names was compared to the first reference list for candidate identification. One candidate, who had been recommended by both referrals, was my next interview.

The interview with the Chamber of Commerce director and coordinator of the Wilhelm Leadership Program was a strong community connection. The chamber director provided a list of 18 previous leadership program graduates to contact for a focus group. This list had no

repeats from earlier suggested contacts. Of these referrals, seven participated in focus group interviews.

As interviews continued, the fifth interview was with the pastor of a local church. Though somewhat new to the community, he provided a valuable perspective, and was able to put me in contact with the coordinator of the Wilhelm Ministerial Alliance.

The sixth interview was a business leader with the Wilhelm Business Development Company who had been recommended by the city official in the first interview. This interview led to a list of ten suggested contacts for a focus group, all of whom were invited to Focus Group 3.

The seventh person interviewed was a community service provider working on family health issues. She had been on the referral list provided by the chamber director. She provided an additional contact of a person working her way out of poverty, which then snowballed to two additional interviews.

While making these connections, I specifically sought connections with participants who may be underrepresented, or who could put me in contact with key informants who might be described as underrepresented. To gain these connections, I sought the names of contacts that provide services to the poor, homeless, or needy. One key informant that helped me to make these connections was a clergy in a leadership role with the local ministerial alliance. His assistance provided contact with a network of community social service care providers working to address issues of homelessness, poverty, and recovery services. This group of service providers became the primary participants for the second focus group. I also identified potential research candidates while doing physical data collection. An article in the local paper highlighted the issue of homelessness in the community and provided the names of two organizations

providing services to the homeless. I invited these program directors a focus group. When schedules conflicted for focus group involvement, a time for an interview was arranged.

In addition to structured interviews I also conducted casual or unstructured interviews. These spontaneous interviews were intended to seek a "citizen on the street perspective." Casual interviews included conversations with community members about history, buildings, or community events. Through these abbreviated interactions, I was able to connect with other in the community including a conversation with the Hispanic male waiter at a Mexican restaurant, the attendant at an art gallery while we were waiting for a rainstorm to break, a visit with a young woman who was working her way out of poverty at a Circles™ meeting, and short conversations with residents during a visit to a women's shelter house. These conversations tended to be shorter conversations and often without great depth. However, these unplanned conversation opportunities that arose during visits to the community provided some limited data collection, and were valuable to help gain perspectives from others in the community for this research.

When contacting referrals from the interviews, I used the name of the local contact who referred them to me when I introduced myself. Sharing the name of the person or people who referred me to them seemed to make a significant difference in their receptivity to continue the conversation. I also shared that I was a student at Kansas State University, and the university affiliation also seemed to help establish credibility.   A letter of introduction and invitation to the focus group was sent to each of the potential participants. In addition to the formal letter, a hand written note was included to identify who had referred them, and encouragement to participate in the event. While the letter shared that I would be confirming the invitation with a phone call, I also included an email address and phone number for them to reach me in response to the letter.

Three days later, I began the process of phoning candidates to personally invite them to one of the three planned focus groups.

A similar invitation process was followed for each of the three focus groups. The first focus group candidate names came from the community leadership program coordinator. The invitation list for the second focus group consisted of names of persons in leadership roles that provide services to persons that might be considered 'unusual voices'. These contacts were primarily identified through an interview with a local pastor and a conversation with the coordinator of the local ministerial alliance. The people who were providing services to the homeless identified in the newspaper article mentioned earlier were also invited. The third focus group was comprised of participants who were identified by the director of the Wilhelm Business Development Association as community civic leaders. The list of invited participants included administrative leadership of the school, economic development coordinators, bankers, elected county government, industry, an attorney, and the coordinator of the college career placement program.

For all three focus groups, dates and times were confirmed by email for those who had shared their email. For those without email, meeting attendance was confirmed with a phone call. Each focus group interview followed the facilitated dialogue format detailed in the facilitator's guide to conduct the focus group conversation. The facilitators guide is included with this report in Appendix A. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions and were given an opportunity to discuss their understanding of civic leadership. Then, using a timeline as a visual reference, participants in the focus group were asked to share stories about significant events that changed their community in the 1990's and first 12 years of 2000. This gave the participants a chance to share their perceptions of civic involvement associated with

those events. Participants were able to elaborate on their civic involvement, thoughts on civic leadership, and ideas on community change.

Observation

Direct observation is a technique often used to collect data when the opportunity presents itself to directly observe the phenomenon being studied. In this study, observation is important to understand the context of community. Observation of physical community, interactions with groups and attendance at community events will be provided for context of this study. Observations are documented by field notes and audio recording, and transcribed for integration into this research report.

Physical Artifacts

Physical artifacts also provide documentation and evidence of public involvement, levels of public participation, and evidence of active participation in community issues. Physical artifacts utilized or reviewed in this study include:

- Leadership Wilhelm program schedules
- Leadership Wilhelm Curriculum data;
- Timelines generated from Focus Groups One, Two and Three
- Contact lists from interviews and focus groups
- Wilhelm community website
- AT&T phonebook for the Wilhelm area
- Wilhelm Business Development Corporation history
- Wilhelm Business Development Corporation 50 Years, Annual meeting document
- Wilhelm, Kansas Economic Development Strategic Action Plan

- Official Guide to Wilhelm, Kansas

- Committees and boards membership lists for the following community service

  organizations:

  •   Wilhelm Chamber of Commerce

  •   Wilhelm Business Development Committee

  •   Wilhelm Main Street organization

  •   County Small Business Development Association

  •   Wilhelm City Commission

  •   Wilhelm County Commission

  •   District School Board

  •   Hospital improvement committee

  •   Board of Trustees for the local retirement community

  •   Board of Trustees for Wilhelm College

  •   Wilhelm Recreation Commission

  •   Optimists Club

  •   YMCA Board.

Physical data integration is described in the data analysis section.

Section 6: Data Analysis Process

This study aims to ask questions, listen, observe, and collect data to investigate the overarching question: "How do citizens experience civic leadership in a Midwestern rural community?" Data analysis began with the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) of data analysis, wherein data is continually reviewed and

compared with other in-coming data. This method allows growing impressions and assumptions to be checked for confirmation and allows the research to identify gaps or unanswered questions in process of research. The research track allowed data collection and further inquiry on topics or events to inform the case. Audio recordings of focus groups and interviews were transcribed for coding. Data from both the personal interviews and focus groups provide comparative texts for analysis.

Data from participant interactions were coded several times. Because individual interview responses tended to be more complete than the responses from the focus groups, individual interviews were coded first. Individual interviews were not influenced by the perspectives of others, which made them cleaner for initial coding. Focus group dynamics allow one person to give his or her perspective, which, in turn, influences other participants. One individual would say civic leadership is "x", and the next person would agree and add that civic leadership is "x + y."   Or, as was often the case, the second answer would be "and y."   The following example demonstrates how the topical thread of the conversation influences other participant responses. This example was transcribed from a focus group. Emphasis is added to reflect the evolving theme.

> Participant1: For me it is *plugging into* those organizations and initiatives that drive the community, be it commerce, be it nonprofits, it is *plugging into* what makes our community what it is.

> Participant 3: I think what makes it so successful is if you *plug into* what you are *passionate about* – no matter what it is in town, there are plenty to choose from, and so you pick what your *passion is, and you plug in* and become a leader.

Participant 4: (nodding in agreement) And it is common people who jump in there and follow their *passions*.

Participant 7: They have all said everything … you have to find *your passion,* and everybody finds it, and there is just so many diverse ways in town, but it is different than management – and that makes sense. Because it is the little people...(Focus Group 1 transcript, July 18, 2012)

This streaming conversation content influenced the emphasis on certain ideas. In an interview, it would have been mentioned as the first person did, but not echoed by anyone else. While a group conversation may discourage someone from re-stating what has already been expressed, this "piggybacking" of ideas typically emphasizes a key idea. In this way, the focus group itself plays a role of coding the message. A key idea often gets repeated or expanded upon. However, focus group transcription coding required constant attention to both what was implied and not repeated, and to what was repeated. Group affirmation is an important way of emphasizing key ideas. Affirmation took place both verbally, and non-verbally. Field notes were important to document non-verbal affirmation when agreement was expressed.

The first step in data assessment was sorting the data. Transcripts from each interview and focus group were individually coded. Transcripts were open coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to identify key concepts of civic leadership in community. Open coding themes were identified and compared. Assessment of transcripts explored common terms, descriptions, and metaphors used by participants to describe the concept of civic leadership. While responses to specific responses to each interview question were also compared and coded. Saldana (2009) best describes the first-cycle coding process, "I advocate that qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity

and regularity – a pattern – they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (p. 8).

Member checking was used as a first-level check of reliability of data from interviews. An interview summary and interpretations were returned to the interview participants with a request to confirm their accuracy. Member-check summaries were sent by email to those that had shared their email, and by letter to those who had not shared email. This was an effective tool for those that had email. Of those emailed, several replied to confirm or to elaborate on the response. This led to an opportunity both for clarification and to receive additional information. Of the summaries physically mailed, there was no response.

Data were also sorted by collection method, and then aligned by question. For example, the transcribed interview responses from all interview participants to question "what does the term civic leadership mean to you?" were compiled on one page. Each response was reviewed and key words and ideas or short phrases were documented for each participant response. This was done for each interview response. After assigning the first-level descriptors, data was revisited and compared to identify patterns of emerging codes. Coded responses were reviewed between responses to find recurrences and similarities that were identified as clusters or patterns. The example given (Figure 3.2) is a sample of coding of two interview responses to the question, "What does the term civic leadership mean to you?" This Figure is modeled after a coding process detailed by Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002). The example illustrates an example of how original responses were coded, patterns were identified, and concepts were clustered together. This clustering brought out the first indications of shared perceptions of how citizens understand civic leadership.

Sample of Coding and Clustering

Third Iteration = Application to Data Set
Civic Leadership:
Active Involvement: Volunteer/service
Intent: make the community better
Cause: Personal Responsibility
Both What and How: Government/Organizations

Second Level Coding = Patterns and concept clusters

P1: A) Community betterment

B) Service through Political office or Volunteer service/ organizational involvement

P2: A) Community betterment

B) Volunteer

C) Drive/ Desire/Civic Duty- Responsibility

First Level Coding = Initial codes/Key words and phrases

P1:
people who are willing to step up
political office
volunteer basis
with the good of the community in mind,
Willing to make (the community) better.

P2:
volunteer
your civic duty,
your community service,
willingness to make community a better place.
Desire
Personal drive

Raw Data responses to Question 1: What does the Term Civic Leadership mean to you?

P1: Well it, people who are willing to step up either in political office or on a volunteer basis, with the good of the community in mind, and willing to make it better.

P2: I think of volunteer. I think of your civic duty, your community service, your willingness to make your community a better place. I suppose it could be a paid position, but as much as..it is just that desire to make your community a better place. That personal drive, I guess.

Figure 3.2 Example of Coding and Categorization of Data

The base coding process was repeated first for the responses from interviews, and then for responses from focus groups. Responses to coding were constantly compared within and between categories and data sets. This constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) helped provide context for emerging themes. When coding focus group responses, contextual variance was noted, for piggybacking or context when the responses were referencing other focus group participant comments. The next step, or Level 2 analysis, was to compare the results of the two base-level coding exercises to again seek commonalities, differences, and patterns. Clustering responses from interviews was compared to clustering responses from the focus group data for the question "What does the term civic leadership mean to you?" Upon merging data

sets, themes begin to emerge. For example, it was clear that some clustered responses referred to *what* civic leadership means, some referred to *who* civic leaders are, and some referred to *how* civic leadership is accomplished. These themes were then compared and contrasted with observation data to "check" for validity or contradictions. Likewise, themes were compared to physical artifacts for validation with physical data sources.

A third level of analysis involved resorting and matching the data compilations resulting from the above steps. By sorting transcript data, other comparative assessments were possible. A sorting and comparison based on the annual household income of participants was completed. These transcripts were then again reviewed to seek similarities and themes reflected in the economic clustering. Data was also matched by interview questions as they aligned with research questions. Because specific interview and focus group questions were asked for the purpose of gathering different insight toward the same research questions, the results of corresponding data were compared. For example, the following questions were asked in both interview and focus groups; "What does civic leadership mean to you?" and "Share an example of civic leadership in this community." Both questions were asked to better inform the research question: "How do citizens understand civic leadership?" As Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002) note: "Keeping in mind that research questions provide the scaffolding for the investigation and the cornerstone for the analysis of the data, researchers should form interview questions on the basis of what truly needs to be known'' (p. 31). Comparing the emerging themes from each question, provides a broader analysis to gain insight into the research question. Table 3.1 identifies the relationship between research question and sources of data for triangulation.

Table 3.1 Data Sources to Address Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Source Interview Questions	Focus Group Questions	Observation	Physical Artifacts
How do citizens understand civic leadership?	2,3,4,7,8	1,2,3,7		X
How are citizens involved with civic leadership in this rural community?	3,4,5,6,8	2,3,4,5,8	X	X
How do citizens perceive their ability to participate in community change?	2,3,4,8	3,4,8		X
How do citizens perceive changes in civic leadership in the community over time?	1,5,6,7,9	4,5,6		X

The above data were pulled together to review research themes, and to get a "picture" of how residents perceive of their capacity for civic leadership. Each cluster of responses to research questions was coded. Coding clusters and emerging themes were compared across data fields to identify supporting or conflicting evidence in the physical data. Detail of the data sources and corresponding interview questions is provided in Appendix C.

Chapter 4 - Findings: Insights into Civic Leadership

This case study provides a window to peer into a rural community to explore how citizens perceive their ability to participate in the decisions and actions of that community. The investigation is an important exploration and documentation of citizen perceptions in relation to their sense of agency, or their ability to engage in and create positive change. Chapter 4 provides the data and insights of the case study. This chapter is divided by sections. Section 1 is an introduction and brief overview of the community of Wilhelm. Research data is then presented beginning with data gathered from guided individual interviews in section 2, focus group interviews in section 3, and data from unstructured interviews, observation and physical artifacts in section 4. Research findings for each of these methods are reported to address each research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings in section 5.

Section 1: A Description of a Rural Community: Wilhelm, Kansas

As you approach the community of Wilhelm, grain elevators and a water tower are the first visible features that rise above the fenced wheat fields and rows of trees. As you draw closer, you notice that Wilhelm hosts churches, schools, businesses and industries in what appears to be a thriving community with clean, wide streets. It is in this rural community that this investigation was launched to learn how residents describe and experience civic leadership. My first direct contact with the community involved driving around to explore the business, residential, and industrial areas in town. Driving through the community provided a broad overview of social, economic, business and recreational investments in the community. By driving through the neighborhoods, I gained a general sense of the range of housing, shopping,

and recreation alternatives in the community. The initial drive-through allowed me to draw a first impression of the community. The tree-lined streets were generally wide and clean. Housing varied widely in age, size and construction types. Newer, larger homes were constructed on the south and north ends of the community, while houses in the heart of the community tended to be older homes, built in the early to mid-1900s. Mature trees and well-maintained lawns gave the neighborhoods with older houses a quaint, peaceful feel. A quick web search of homes in the community identified several three-bedroom homes built in or around 1900 for sale for more than $100,000. According to Trulia.com, average listing price of all properties in Wilhelm in September of 2012 was just more than $155,000. Yards were typically well maintained and free of clutter. Community members were visible in the streets, walking or riding bicycles. Green space, trails and parks are cleanly integrated into the city and baseball, soccer and recreation fields are prevalent. A few properties interspersed throughout the community appeared vacant and showed neglect.

This area of Kansas was settled in the late 1800s by immigrants of both Swedish Lutheran and Mennonite background. Religious organizational beliefs often have community social involvement implications. To see if a single faith or religious affiliation dominated my research data, church affiliation information was collected with the demographic data from participants. A dominant representation of one religious group could indicate an important source of belief or connection with citizen perspectives of civic involvement and leadership. If a dominant belief did exist, it would also help me to identify participants representing a minority or "unusual" perspective. Homogenous religious affiliation turned out not to be a dominant influencing factor in this research. The diversity of participants' religious affiliation and participants' characterization of the religious community as "very diverse" suggested that no

single religious group's ideology dominated this research or the broader community perspective. Collectively, however, the community's strong Christian background is reflected in the religious themed items in widows of stores on Main Street, the Christian coffee shop and book store, two church-based colleges, and the presence of 38 churches in Wilhelm (AT&T Yellow Pages, 2010).

Historically an agricultural area, the discovery of oil helped boost the local economy in the early 20th century. In 1932, a crude oil refinery was built near Wilhelm, and continues to operate today. The two area economic drivers of oil and agriculture were expanded again in 1959 with the formation of the Wilhelm Business Development Company (WBDC). According to *50 Years 1959-2009,* a 2009 WBDC meeting document, an aggressive Chamber of Commerce agreed to create, "the permanent industrial committee of the Chamber"(2009, p. 4). A news clipping from 1959 reproduced in *50 Years 1959-2009*, states "the development company is designed to promote and assist new industries in establishing manufacturing plants in Wilhelm" (2009, p. 4). The WBDC was incorporated as a for-profit company because of the flexibility this provided. Shares of stock were sold to build a revolving fund primarily for industrial development investment. This arm of the Chamber of Commerce has garnered resources and aggressively pursues a focus on industrial business development, which serves as a third primary economic driver for the community. According to the WBDC (2009) *50 Years 1959-2009* document, as of 2009 "one in five workers in the county is a manufacturing employee" (p. 2).

When discussing community changes that had taken place over the past 20 years, a series of events in Wilhelm were brought up repeatedly by research participants. In the 1990s, the public was involved in passing a ½ cent sales tax for the reconstruction of the city pool. The revenue from the sales tax started a series of public investment projects. Income generation from

the sales tax surpassed the needed funding for the development of a new waterpark which replaced the old city pool. The sales-tax income was next allocated to a public library expansion project in 2003. When those changes were completed, the public voted in 2009 to support the completion of refurbishment of the community opera house. These three projects were the most frequently referenced examples from both the focus groups and interviews. Often referenced as "city projects" these three events were common historical references in each of the three focus groups while completing the timeline.

The US Census Bureau (2012) reports the population of Wilhelm, Kansas between 10,000 and 15,000 people in 2010. According to the Kansas Statistical Abstract 2011, Wilhelm has shown steady population growth from 1910 to 2000, growing roughly a thousand people every 10 years. A largely homogeneous community, 90.6% of the population is white non-Hispanic, and persons reporting Latino or Hispanic origin comprise 4.8% of the population. Few minorities were evident when spending time in Wilhelm. A participant of the third focus group joked that when his wife moved to the community that she doubled the community's Hispanic population. Another participant in that focus group responded, "She probably did." Persons reporting two or more races comprise 2.2%. The next largest segment of the population, black persons comprise 1.5% of the population. All other populations represented are less than one percent of the community population.
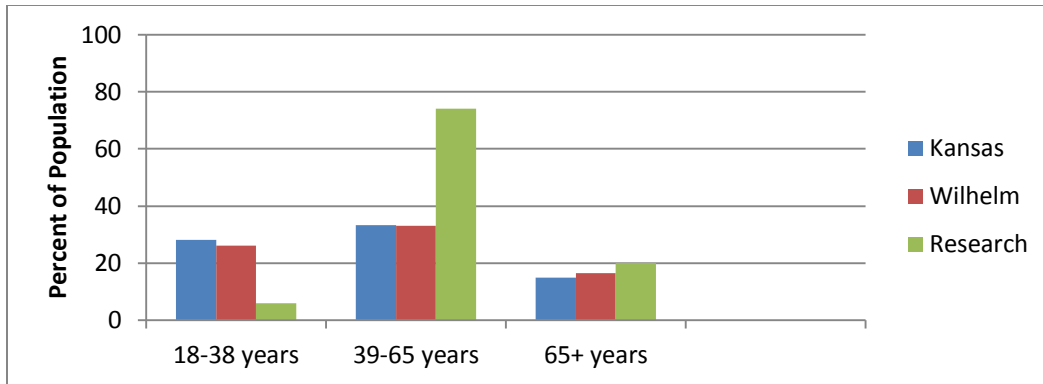
Figure 4.1: Research population comparison by age. Source: 2010 Census, Summary File 1, Table Q2-P2.

Age demographics (American Fact Finder ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates for 2006-2010) indicate that median age of Wilhelm resident is 37.5 years. Approximately a quarter of the community population (24.4%) is under the age of 18, and 16.5% are 65 years and older. Figure 4.1 indicates the ages of participants in this study in comparison to the percent of population by age category for both Wilhelm and in comparison with the state of Kansas.

Civic Leadership and the Wilhelm Leadership Program

Early in each interview study participants were asked directly, "What does the term *civic leadership* mean to you?" The question was often met with a hesitant pause. The term 'civic leadership' did not seem to be in the daily vernacular of community residents. A middle-aged civil servant began with a pause and said, "That is a good question." As community that was selected for its reputation as one of exemplary civic leadership, I was curious as to why this would be a difficult question. One young mother responded to the question by apologetically saying,

I was a little off balance when you said that. Ok, civic leadership. Let's see, civic generally means public – as far as organized. So civic leadership to me - I am probably not the best person to ask that question. (Interview participant, personal communication, July 14, 2012)

As other respondents also struggled to respond to this question, it became clearer to me that the term "civic leadership" may not be used frequently in the community. This became evident in an interview with the community leadership program coordinator, who confided,

I think civic leadership to me there is a, having that title, those terms, civic, and leadership, people are a little leery about. They don't see themselves as a leader, and civic is a broad and important term, and most people don't feel they can fill the role of a civic leader. (Interview participant, personal communication, June 3, 2012)

She went on to explain that the Wilhelm leadership program supported the concepts of civic leadership, but did not really use that terminology. In this early interview, I learned that while the leadership program had been offered to the community for 32 years, the focus for many years was best described by the coordinator as "panels and tours"(interview participant, June 3, 2012) programming. This changed in 2000 when the program began to focus on building leadership skills in the participants. The program coordinator shared that when the program changed in 2000, there was an emphasis on the concept of 'servant leadership.' Sometime after 2000, that terminology also changed. "The term 'servant leadership' was the term we had been trained in" the coordinator noted, "but when [program changes occurred] 'servant leadership' was kind of phased out and 'civic' then was utilized" (interview participant, June 3, 2012). The coordinator went on to note that regardless of the term used to describe it, the programming did not change. When asked if the program defines or teaches about civic leadership in any way, the program

coordinator responded that it does not. This was a pivotal point for this research. It indicated

that while the local leadership program may be supporting leadership skill development in

citizens of the community, the program was not specifically working to describe or explain the

practice of civic leadership. This community was identified as exemplary for its characteristics

of civic leadership, yet it did not have a community leadership development program that was

purposeful in its efforts to describe or develop civic leadership. The coordinators' dismissive use

of terminology indicated that the leadership program was not providing community members a

clear and consistent message about civic leadership. A review of the program's written materials

confirmed the "loose" terminology. The scheduled agenda (shared electronically, October,

2012) for the first session of the 2012 Leadership Wilhelm class presented the topic in this way:

> Next Session –
>
> - Continue learning about servant/civic leadership
> - Visioning

Session two of the course involved a thirty minute section dedicated to civic engagement

(Wilhelm Leadership Program Session two agenda, shared electronically, October 2012), but the

written curriculum material that was provided for this research did not include materials which

provided a distinction of civic or servant leadership. There was no indication of shared written

material or references that would help the participant identify an established description of civic

leadership. This lack of a clear definition of civic leadership for the community may explain

why many of the other interview respondents paused before describing what civic leadership

meant to them, and some asked for the wording again. A hesitant response was also common

when this question was asked in informal conversations with people in the community. Once

they had a moment to think, participants continued with their response. The uncertainty of

community members about the term civic leadership was a good entry point for this research. It reflected that this research was travelling down a road that was unexplored for many in the community, and that the community did not have an established or shared definition for civic leadership. In a reflection on the summary of data collected, of the fourteen interviewed candidates, five of the interviewed participants had not been involved with the Wilhelm Leadership Program. Of those that had a history of involvement with the Wilhelm Leadership Program, the majority had been through prior to the program emphasis change in 2000. Leadership program participation for focus groups included six recent program graduates in Focus Group 1; two graduates from the 1990s in Focus Group 2; and one confirmed leadership program graduate, in Focus Group 3. In summary, only ten of the thirty four participants in this study had been participants in the Wilhelm Leadership Program since the shift in program emphasis to include the topic of civic leadership.

Section 2: Findings from Individual Interviews

Overview of Individual Interview Participants

The initial three key informants for the guided interviews were identified as described in chapter 3. These positional contacts provided insight to community structure and an entrance into the local social network. Participant referrals from these first three contacts resulted in the recruitment of focus group participants and three additional interviews. Other interview candidates were identified serendipitously or through purposeful efforts to fill research gaps. For example, while collecting physical artifact data at the public library, serendipitous interactions led to two connections, one guided key informant interview and one casual interview. At another time, a follow-up interview was established with church office staff member during a

stop to visit with the pastor. Purposeful interviews were established with community service providers for their perspective as well as for the additional connections they might provide. An example of a purposeful interview is the connection with the director of a women's shelter program. I had read about the establishment of the women's shelter in the local paper. Because of her work with a population of persons in the community that may be under-represented, I purposefully made the connection. In contacting her, a co-director of the program offered to join us for the interview. In that situation, I was able to meet them both for coffee and interviewed them jointly. In another example, a purposeful connection was made with the local newspaper editor for an interview. A low number of editorials in the local paper led me to seek an explanation and interview with a representative from the local paper.

Guided interviews provided documented input from a range of occupational perspectives. Figure 4.2 identifies the number of interviews by gender in four categories. Categories represent the following positions:

Nonprofit: church, and social service providers
Private Business: financial institution, business development; and media
 Student/ Service
Public Employees: City and County Employees
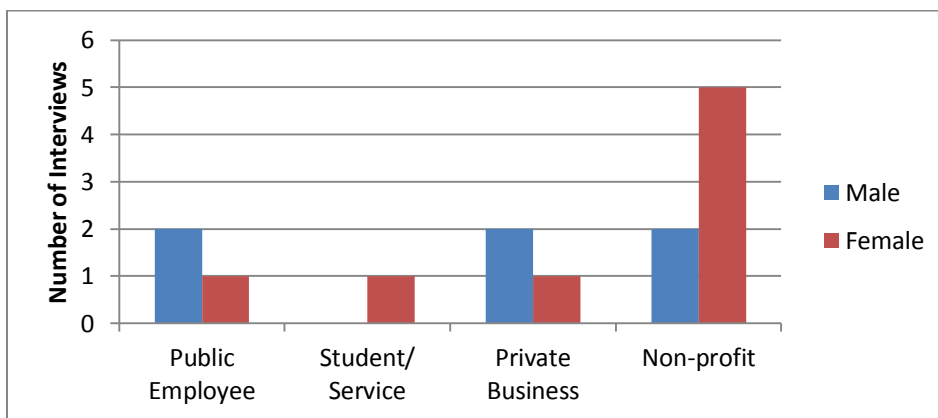
Figure 4.2 Number of Guided Interviews by Occupation

Fourteen key informants were formally interviewed. Each interview was arranged in advance, and all were conducted at a location preferred by the interviewee. This included several interviews held in professional offices and meeting rooms, as well as at a local coffee shop and even in a living room of a private residence. One interview was established in person, but conducted by phone.

Nine interviewees were between ages 39-65. Two participants were between 18-38 years of age, and three interview participants were 65 years of age or older. Each person involved in interviews and focus groups completed a demographic information sheet indicating their annual household income. The income categories on the request card included five income options. These options were established by sorting the diversity of 2010 total household income statistics for households in Wilhelm (US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006-2010) into five, roughly equivalent categories (Figure 4.3)
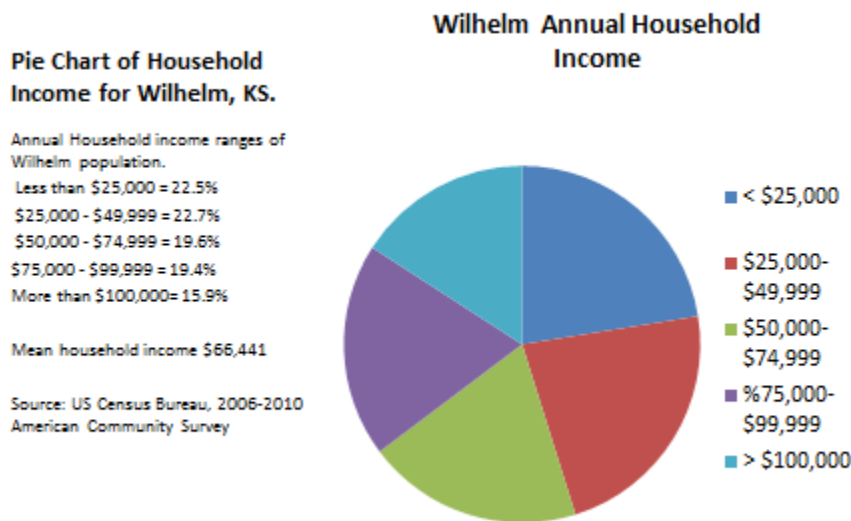
Figure 4.3 Wilhelm Annual Household Income Categories by Percent Population.

Each income range encompassed 19 - 22% of the population of Wilhelm, with the exception of the "more than $100,000 category that comprised roughly 16% of the population.
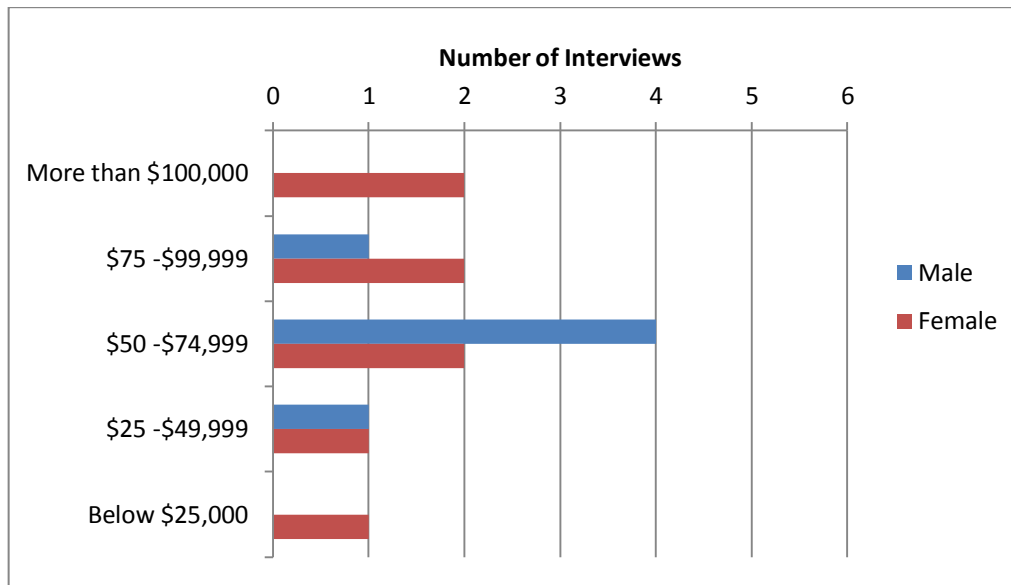
Figure 4.4: Interview Participants by Gender and Annual Household Income

Figure 4.4 is representative of the annual household income of the 14 individuals that participated in interviews. Annual household income levels of those interviewed ranged from "less than $25,000" (1 participant) to "More than $100,000 (2 participants). All indicated their ethnicity as white, with one also marking American Indian/Alaska Native. Twelve indicated education levels at "bachelor's degree or higher" while two indicated their education at the "High School Graduate" level.

Demographics cards also indicated a range of religious affiliation. Responses included: Christian (2), Methodist (2), Lutheran (2), Catholic (1), Presbyterian (1), Protestant (1), and Covenant (1). Three did not indicate an affiliation.

In summary, interview participants represented a range of ages, incomes, and level of education. However, most strongly represented in this study were white, 39-64 year old

educated Christians with an annual household income of $50,000 or above. The median age of Wilhelm residents is 38.5; mean household income is $66, 441; and 93% of the population is white (US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates).

Findings from Individual Interviews

Spending time with individuals in their offices and homes to talk about civic leadership was an insightful experience. Interview findings in this section include: results of how citizens understand civic leadership; how civic leadership is expressed; how participants perceived their ability to bring about change, and; how participants perceived changes in civic leadership opportunities over time.

When asked about civic leadership, some told stories about themselves and efforts they had been involved with to bring about community change, while others spoke of people in the community they identified as civic leaders. Each conversation brought new insights to how community residents understand civic leadership and their ability to participate in community leadership efforts. Each interview provided a glimpse into not only the individual perspective, but also a window into a diverse community field network. The collective of responses shape an understanding of just how civic leadership is shared among citizens and how deeply it permeates the local culture.

Themes also reflected insight on how citizens are involved in civic leadership in the community. Interview participants shared stories and examples of how they experienced or were involved in civic leadership. Three avenues of engagement in civic leadership were described that included involvement through:

- ▪ Self-initiative

- Service through organizations

- Service through government

The association of the meaning of the term civic leadership with service to government and organizations was evident, as was the perception that government and organizations are primary avenues to engage in civic leadership. The aspect of how citizens participate in civic leadership was analyzed by two factors: reported involvement with community change and how participants perceived their own ability to affect change. A simple Yes/No response chart identifies if participants *have* affected community change, and if they believe they *can* affect meaningful change. Ten of the fourteen interviews represented a double positive, or yes/yes response, while four interviews represented a mixed response.

Responses were also compared by participant income category. Results show little economic association with any particular perception of ability and community change-making experience, except in one category. All of the interviewed participants with incomes under $50,000 annual household income represented a mixed response in their perception and ability to make change.

How Interview Participants Understand Civic Leadership

This section reviews how citizens involved in interviews understood civic leadership. Responses to the following three interview questions were reviewed and compared:

What does the term civic leadership mean to you?

Tell me a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community.

How would you describe your experiences with civic leadership in this community?

The stories and illustrations provided in response to these questions were reviewed for context of how citizens understand civic leadership. Stories provided in response to interview questions

about community change events and the question, "How would you assess your ability to bring about meaningful change in/for your community?" also provided context for this understanding. In addition, physical artifacts including Wilhelm Leadership program schedules and curriculum were reviewed.

Several insights emerged through the interview process and resulting data analysis. Emerging themes from interviews revealed several shared understandings including that civic leadership:

- Is a civic responsibility

- Is expressed through action

- Involves working together

- Is for betterment of the community

One emerging theme is that citizens associated personal involvement aspects of civic leadership as a responsibility and action. A second commonly held idea is that civic leadership must serve the community. The data also reflected that civic leadership is often seen as a collaborative activity. These emerging themes are explored below.

Civic leadership requires personal involvement.

Interview participants were asked to respond to the question, "What does the term civic leadership mean to you?" Interviewees described attributes that contribute to how they understand civic leadership. Two strong themes expressed when describing civic leadership include a shared emphasis on personal responsibility and taking action. Responsibility was frequently expressed as it applied to personal responsibility, responsibility to others in the community, and responsibility for physical aspects of community. One community leader said it directly, when she noted: "To me it is a responsibility - of being a citizen of a community - a

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non-monetary contribution you make" (Community program leader, interview, June 3, 2012).

Another spoke of civic leadership in terms of a personal drive to serve others,

> I think of your civic duty, your community service, your willingness to make your
>
> community a better place. I suppose it could be a paid position, but as much as… it's just
>
> that *desire* to make your community a better place. That personal drive, I guess.
>
> (Government employee, interview, June 21, 2012)

A third interview hinted that civic leadership is about involvement in community because of a personal caring. She links caring about community with a responsibility to others and future generations,

> Well, I guess I would think that it means being involved in the community in a
>
> meaningful way and wanting to make [Wilhelm] a place where I want to continue to live.
>
> So now my grandkids are in the school that my kids went to. That you care what happens
>
> in your town or community – I think that is what leadership is - that you care what
>
> happens. (Private business owner, interview, August 3, 2012)

The theme of personal responsibility for civic leadership was also noted in other interview perspectives. The theme of civic leadership as a responsibility was the first emerging theme of how citizens understood civic leadership.

A second recurring element of personal involvement was expressed through the idea of taking action for community betterment. Interview comments tie the concept of taking action through personal involvement to a personal passion. Throughout interviews and conversations there was an emphasis that civic leadership involves an imperative for action. In addition to speaking of it out-right, action verbs were often used in the descriptions of civic leadership, such

as "doing what is best," "volunteering," and "being involved in your community."   In addition to the already noted action-oriented examples above, an elected official speaks here about the value of individual and citizen action in this interview excerpt,

> Civic leadership is those of us that are … involved in lots of different things, they are involved in input, they are involved in volunteerism, we are all involved in working on projects together… (Wilhelm elected official, interview, June 11, 2012)

Again, the following quote probably best encapsulates and summarizes the theme of action in personal involvement as an interviewee defines civic leadership as, "Participating in community – being active to work together to address issues" (Family service provider, interview, June 18, 2012). Nearly every interview described civic leadership through personal involvement by taking responsibility and action.

Civic leadership serves to better the community.

Another key theme that emerged in interviews is the idea of working to make the community better. Often stated directly, working or investing oneself for the betterment of the community was a second category that arose from coding. One participant highlighted the idea of working for the well-being of the whole of the community,

> Well to me, civic leadership is anyone who is doing the best they can to promote the community to make the community better, which can mean in any avenue they want to, whether that is in nonprofit, government, education, health, you know, whatever that may be to make it a better community overall. (Lifelong Wilhelm resident, interview, August 10, 2012)

Another participant highlighted the role of working for the good of all in a more hypothetical manner,

> Probably a person of interest and vision in the community that also has the organizational abilities that seeks [sic] to capture to work with the spirit of the community to make it a viable and good place to live for the betterment of the people of the community.
> (Wilhelm citizen, interview, June 27, 2012)

This interview brought up the subject of working for the long-term best interests of the community, "I think that good civic leadership is doing what is best for the community both now and for the future. And that is not always immediately popular" (Wilhelm city employee, interview, June 23, 2012). These three quotes from the interview transcripts highlight the idea of working for what is best for the community, but they were not the only quotes that addressed this concept. Half of the interviewed participants described civic leadership in a way that highlighted working for the betterment of the community.

Civic leadership works through collaboration.

Another emerging theme in the interviews was the idea of civic leadership involving collaboration. This was strongly asserted in the interviews with representatives of the city and business development. An elected city official emphasized the importance of citizens playing a role in community change when he said, "Private citizens need to lead groups, to know issues, to do a lot of different tasks" (Elected city representative, interview, June 11, 2012). He went on to note that he attributed his success in local government to working partnerships.

> When I ran for office, my emphasis has always been on partnerships and relationships. A city cannot get very far without the support of the county. It is up to me to keep the

relationship positive. So, It is up to me to interface correctly with the state, with our US Representatives and Senators in a way that we have a good working relationship. So those are all examples of public- public partnership relationships. … a lot of it boils down to me, into partnerships. So I try to continue to do public /public partnerships, public/ private partnerships, and sometimes I try to facilitate private/private partnerships. (Elected city representative, interview, June 11, 2012)

Collaboration was also highly valued component of civic leadership by business development staff. The importance of a collaborative and supporting relationship between community agencies is emphasized in this interview,

Again – back to civic leadership – I think it is a definite need to have people who are in WBDC, Main Street, Chamber – that are responsible. Each of those agencies, we know we have a good thing going, and we want to keep it that way. And it is nice to work at a place they are proud of… but the responsibility is given to them. […] Working as a team – we have defined responsibilities for each. And we are all friends. (Business development coordinator, interview, July 12, 2012)

Both local government and business recognize the importance of maintaining a strong collaborative relationship for each to reach their goals. The theme of collaboration surfaced in other interviews as well, often in the language of "working together," and was a strong theme that emerged through stories when citizens were asked to share a story of how they have experienced civic leadership in the community.

How Participants are Involved in Civic Leadership

In addition to these defining characteristics of personal involvement and community betterment, many participants also spoke of civic leadership as synonymous with how it was

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expressed within the community. In fact, many of those interviewed used names of organizations specifically as examples to describe civic leadership. More than just emphasizing collaboration, some directly associated the definition of civic leadership with the structures through which civic leadership happens. This desire to define civic leadership through service to local community organizations and civic groups was so strong that organizational involvement became both a category for understanding civic leadership and a category of how citizens participate in civic leadership.

Civic leadership is service in community organizations.

This emerged when interviewees responded to the question, "What does the term civic leadership mean to you?" In the following quote it is possible to see that some participant equates service to civic groups and organizations with civic leadership.

> [Civic leadership is] People who are willing to step up either in political office or on a volunteer basis, with the good of the community in mind, and willing to make it better. ... that they realized they were doing some things right together. Again – back to civic leadership – I think it is a definite need to have people who are in [local organization], Main Street, Chamber – that are responsible. (Wilhelm business developer, interview, July 12, 2012)

A second interview participant draws the parallel of public organizational involvement when he responds, "Sometimes professions require you to be involved in a civic organization, to get involved in the community, so that is what I think of when you say civic leadership" (Wilhelm resident, interview, July 18, 2012). The association of civic leadership with involvement through organizations addressed both how citizens understand leadership and how they were involved with leadership. While there is indication of this theme in how participants defined civic

leadership, it was also referenced in interview stories and examples. This theme is most represented in focus group data; however, it also is reflected in comments of how interviewed participants view local government.

Civic leadership is service through local government.

For some, the association of civic leadership was synonymous with local government. As mentioned with organizational involvement, participants identified local government as both a way of defining civic leadership and an expression of how citizens participate in civic leadership. An elected official from Wilhelm described leadership in this way,

> Civic leadership is those of us that are heading up local and county government, and different not-for-profit agencies are involved in lots of different things, they are involved in input, they are involved in volunteerism, we are all involved in working on projects together in smaller communities. But back to volunteerism, we can't achieve anything in a smaller town, under 15,000 without volunteerism. So there is a key element of civic leadership that has to come from private citizens. Private citizens need to lead groups, to know issues, to do a lot of different tasks. (Elected Wilhelm representative, interview, June 11, 2012)

> This quote, used earlier to emphasize the active role of citizens, also represents the potential of active citizen engagement, which enables local government to be effective. The need for citizen involvement in government was clearly expressed by this elected representative. Again, we hear the connection of civic leadership as engagement in local government and organizations echoed through this perspective shared by community program leader:

Well to me, civic leadership is anyone who is doing the best they can to promote the community to make the community better, which can mean in any avenue they want to, whether that is in nonprofit, government, education, health, you know, whatever that may be to make it a better community overall. (Community program leader, interview, July, 27, 2012)

In review of how community members described their understanding of civic leadership, there was a clear expression that civic leadership has roots in personal involvement. The key coding attributes that surfaced in this data would describe civic leadership as rooted in personal beliefs, holding the collective best interest of the community in mind, and expressed through action, possibly through the work of organizations and local government.

How Interview Participants Perceive Their Ability to Bring About Change

The case investigation in Wilhelm was driving to better understand both how citizens in this community perceived their ability to participate in community change, and how they are involved in civic leadership. In order to better understand how interview participants perceived their ability to bring about community change, it was important to listen to the examples of stories they told. Data for this part of the investigation was derived from stories of community engagement and from the primary interview questions:

How would you describe your experiences of civic leadership in this community?

How would you describe your current ability to make change or provide leadership in or for the community?

Nearly every interview gave me the indication that participants felt they either do, or could play a role in civic leadership in Wilhelm. Interview participants shared stories to illustrate what civic leadership looked like in the community, and in response to being asked for

examples of how they have been involved in civic leadership within the community. While the 'city project' examples of community change initiatives were identified by multiple participants, most interviewees gave multiple examples of civic involvement. In addition, 10 of the interviewed participants provided an example of civic leadership efforts that they were directly involved with in some way. The 14 individual interviews each provided distinct examples of local civic leadership. Examples of personally led initiatives included the coordination of community events; citizen-led efforts to provide food supplies to youth in poverty; and volunteer-coordinated athletic programs. Examples of individuals working though organizations included work with the Salvation Army, the school system, the churches, and the Wilhelm Local Growth and Development Committee. Inclusion of citizens in local city government was reflected in a story of a task force for community planning; the responsiveness of city staff to test and alter street design; and an individual whose father served in a voluntary leadership role for the city for 40 years. In all, 14 distinct examples of civic leadership were shared during the interviews alone.

These interview responses and shared stories were sorted into categories based on the way citizens were either involved in, or perceived their ability to be involved in community leadership. Simply put, the two questions are; *have* community members participated in bringing about community change? and; do community members believe they *can* bring about community change?

Table 4.1 Comparison of Change Experience and Perceived Ability

	Yes	No
Have affected community change	Shared a story of personal involvement in community change efforts	Have not participated in activities for the Wilhelm community
Believe they can affect	Expressed confidence in	Did not believe they had

| community change | personal ability to bring about meaningful change. | ability to affect meaningful change. |

Most of those interviewed (10) represented a double positive, or a yes/ yes response. Four had a mixed response, or yes/ no. None of the interview responses reflected a double negative, or no/no response. Of the 10 that were a double positive, there were many stories that exemplified civic leadership.

Positive/Positive: Creators of involvement opportunities.

The positive/positive response stories included examples from people in formal leadership positions who are making efforts to engage others in community leadership. Not only did these individuals have full confidence in their ability to make change, they actively made change and worked within their organizations and through their authority to purposefully involve others in the community. The following story is an example of how one of the interviewees discussed not only his ability to bring about change, but success he has had in doing so. In this interview, a city representative shared an example of citizen involvement on a project that involved the creation of a welcoming entrance to the community.

How do we create a [welcoming entrance]? I can talk about a [welcoming entrance] as a city official, but what I need is civic leadership to help me get that done. So, I put together a [Welcome to Wilhelm] task force. And this is where civic leadership comes in. I needed leadership from the local foundation, I needed leadership from the chamber of commerce, I needed leadership from private business - large and small – from [major shopping centers] and car dealers to two small business owners, a couple of private

citizens. I needed someone who knew flowers and trees, so we got the parks

superintendent and master gardeners, who are private citizens. All of those things I

needed on the task force. And we worked through and now we have a master plan with 6

gardens, an arch, a roundabout, sculptures, rock – so we have a master plan - that

doesn't happen unless you have community civic leadership in a task force like that. […]

So, that is an example of a project that can't happen without civic leadership. (Wilhelm

elected leadership, interview, June 11, 2012)

This story illustrates how the participant was using his position in city government to

purposefully create opportunities to engage citizens in community projects. On a larger scale,

the story highlights how the local government designs opportunities for citizens to become

involved in the design and execution of ideas for community improvement. The story and

interview supported that this participant had created effective community change, and he

expressed confidence in his role to make change.

Positive/Positive: Initiators of change.

Other story examples that reflected (positive/positive) were initiated by citizens apart

from the structure of government or organizations. This next story exemplifies the work of

someone who did not work from a position or formal authority, but stepped up to respond to

needs in the community. The following story illustrates not only her passion and excitement that

drove her to action, but also details her process of building a network to bring about change.

Well, it was wonderful. It is wonderful when you feel like you have got an idea, and the

more you talk about it, the more people really get excited about it. And as you keep

going then… At first it was this abstract idea, first of all, it just made sense to me. It was

one of the first times that something just made sense to me. We needed to raise $5,000 to

bring [a speaker] to town. I didn't even begin to understand how to do that, but we did, and what we said was, we want people to hear him, and if the community gets behind it we will do it, and if they don't, we won't – because we just can't do it ourselves. And it just built this excitement when people wanted to do it. [...] [The pastor and] I visited with the community foundation, and the United Way director, and so initially, it was the four of us, wanting to bring it to the community. We started meeting, and went looking for people. We involved Habitat for Humanity, the school district, and there were some retired people from our church, and another church and Head Start. And then we had about ten people. So, that group of ten really spear-headed it forward. Now I tend to talk too much, and so I probably tended to organize those meetings a little bit, but that is how it really started. So I am very proud of the fact that we have huge grass roots support for it. It is easy to talk about it when you really believe it. But by far and away, we are passionate and enthusiastic, and we all have enough interconnections that we can make a strong network. We have had a nice broad cross section, so when we can bring these people to the table, it works. (Wilhelm Circles™ program initiator, interview, August 9, 2012)

This story exemplifies how a citizen found her passion, communicated the message, built a network by connecting with others, and collaborated to bring about community change. It demonstrates both the experience of making change and the confidence in her ability to make change.

Positive/Negative: Mixed responses.

As mentioned previously, 10 of the 14 interviews indicated they both had success in bringing about change, and felt confident in their ability to make change. Four, however, did not

demonstrate a yes/yes response. Those whose interview stories and answers indicated a positive/negative response represented a mixed perception of opportunities and potential for involvement. Each identified a different barrier to making change. One expressed that the community had exclusive social networks; another indicated that civic leadership was the role of government; a third indicted money and social networks made his or her ability to affect change difficult; and a fourth indicated that social, cultural, and economic barriers kept those in poverty from participating in civic leadership. However, in each of these situations, the person was either able to tell me about how they had made community change, were currently involved in community change, or felt they could bring about community change. This category presented something of an enigma, because the stories of success either contradicted their assertion that they did not have the skills, or they expressed the capacity to take leadership, but the community prevented them from doing so. The stories illustrate the contradiction.

Mixed Response: Perceived barriers to change.

The first example surfaced in an interview with a female public employee who had lived and worked for 26 years in the community. She indicated that she had not participated in community-focused change efforts, and indicated there may be barriers to involvement. When asked about how community change happens, she described the people of the community as 'cliquey'(Government employee, interview, June 21, 2012). She continued,

> If you aren't from here, then you have to work your way into being accepted and being an
> ok person. Yeah, I was on the outside looking in for a long time. And I still would say
> that I probably am. (Government employee, interview, June 21, 2012)

Her characterization of community networks gave the impression of tight social networks with an 'in group' of the community that purposefully excluded outsiders. She continued to note that the combination of networking, financial resources, and family or community connections play an important role being accepted in the community.

> Part of it is that, part of it is I think having stature, having money and where your husband works. [A local industry] is such an employer in the community, so many people work there, that a lot of that is relationship built. 'I know you, so I know your family.' That's kind of the secret is that you have to have that desire, that want. (Government employee, interview, June 21, 2012)

However, when I asked her how she would describe her current ability to bring about meaningful provide leadership for community change, she responded:

> Oh I think anybody can do it. You have to touch, you have to make contacts. You have got to make a network. But I think anyone who can make a good enough point, can gain momentum. I think this is a listening community. It is a willing, open-minded community. (Government employee, interview, June 21, 2012)

Her story indicated she had not been involved in community change and she expressed perceived limitations to becoming involved. She went on to describe that she was confident she could make change, but, 'there are costs' she explained, of taking time, building relationships, and finding money.

In another interview with a middle-aged male, also in a position of leadership of a public organization, an opposite perspective was expressed. In this situation, the interviewee had told a story of how he successfully led a sizeable community change effort. In his interview, he shared,

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We held focus groups, did a community survey seeking community input. You just step

along the process. We did have broad involvement. There is a group of hard-core

supporters that got involved. There are eight on the board. In August, there was a bond

issue that passed by 76%. We had a marketing campaign – we knew what we wanted to

stress, and how we were going to do it. (City employee, interview, June 30, 2012)

He described this process with such confidence, that his next answer was a surprise. When asked

how he would describe his current ability to bring about meaningful leadership for community

change, he replied:

Um, in Wilhelm, money talks. Even though I have this experience in creating this

marketing campaign, programming, marketing, and building projects that I learned from

this project. I am still a civil servant - and we don't have a lot of clout in Wilhelm. My

ability to make change is very, very, limited. (City employee, interview, June 30, 2012)

In this case, someone who had been tested and was successful in bringing about community

change was expressed doubt of his ability to bring about change. Through follow-up

conversations, he made it clear that he knew he could make positive organizational change, but

felt less confident in his ability to create change as an individual citizen.

Mixed Response – Civic leadership is the work of government.

In another interview, I asked a participant to describe what civic leadership meant to him.

This long-time community professional was reaching retirement age, and he held the distinction

of having been in his position of work longer than the others in his office. His response, in

essence, was that civic leadership is what local government does.

Good question, you know, civic leaders look out for the best interest of those they serve. To me that is basically what civic leadership is. Do what is best for the town, answer any questions people of the town have. (Wilhelm resident, interview, August 3, 2012)

It became quickly apparent that he defined civic leadership as the work of elected officials. He did not associate himself with civic leadership. Unlike the earlier responses that saw their own involvement in local government as civic leadership, this perspective sees the role of local government as civic leadership. When asked to tell a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community, he shared a story about a local government effort to change street uses, and added,

The city leaders listened to the people. The city leaders had changed it to three lanes, the townspeople reacted quite negatively, and the city changed it back. I think that is a good example right there. They listened to the people, and took the peoples wishes to heart. [spoke about the Mayor] He really has the best interest of Wilhelm at heart. (Wilhelm resident, interview, August 3, 2012)

The interview became coffee shop talk on how he perceived the effectiveness of elected officials. I then asked him to think about how civic leadership has impacted him directly, to which he replied, "It really has not impacted me a whole lot." And finally, when I concluded with the question, "How would you assess your ability to bring about change for the community?" he responded, "About me bringing about change? About the only thing I could do, if there was an issue, […] is come out with an [opinion] column to support or against it – that would be my way of doing community change" (Wilhelm resident, interview, August 3, 2012). By attributing civic leadership to local government officials, he essentially gave the work of leadership to those in office. While he did suggest an avenue where he could have his opinions heard publicly, his

assessment of his ability to bring about community change was very low. This applicant was not the only one to identify local government as a place of civic leadership. Defining civic leadership as the work of elected officials surfaced in a couple of the individual interviews. In successive interviews, if the respondent primarily placed the focus of civic leadership on elected officials, I asked a follow-up question about whose role civic leadership was exclusively, as in this example excerpt from an interview:

> Having good people in charge of the city and different programs within the city. Now when I say good people, that is always hard to define from one person to another but, someone that keeps a program moving, is not afraid to listen to new ideas, and doesn't push his or her own agenda. We have had a string of really good mayors.
>
> [Interviewer: "When you think of civic leadership, is it restricted to elected leadership?"]
>
> No – I don't think it is. (Wilhelm resident, interview, August 10, 2012)

While his first response was to think of an association with local government, that was not the limits of how he thought of civic leadership.

Mixed Response: Civic leadership is the work of middle and upper class.

Similar to the gentleman that delegated the role of civic leadership to local government, the following response also indicates that the role of civic leadership was the responsibility of others. In this case, however, civic leadership was attributed to the role of those in middle and upper class. This initially surfaced in an interview with a young mother who described her background as coming from 'extreme poverty.' I was given her name as a contact person that might be helpful to share the perspective of an "unusual voice" in the community. While she may have been an "unusual voice" in terms of her history of participation in public policy decisions, she spoke up for herself and others struggling with poverty. She was an active

representative of a newly established community program to address poverty, and she shared the perspective of a social group often ignored. When elaborating on what the term 'civic leadership' means to her, she responded:

> I look at things from a very different perspective. My idea was not necessarily to get on board. Because, for me, and what I have grown to understand is that there is a gap of what the meaning actually is - as far as leadership, and for the culture that I came from, we did not feel a part of any of that. (Working mother in Circles™ program, interview, July 14, 2012)

When asked about her sense of opportunity for involvement in community issues, she replied, "There is plenty of opportunity for leadership. But what the opportunity says is, 'you need to come to us and do it our way. Where you don't feel comfortable" (working mother in Circles™ program, interview, July 14, 2012). When asked about her own sense of ability to create community change, she was hopeful and optimistic about her ability, but primarily through the community program to eliminate poverty.

> If I look at myself as a leader, I look at myself as a leader for people in poverty. But my concern is for people in pain, for not having enough resources to get by – to have a way. I see myself as a leader, and I see myself as a faith led leader. Am I outspoken, am I confident to speak in groups, am I learning to sit at tables with people that are not like me, you bet. (working mother in Circles™ program, interview, July 14, 2012)

While living in poverty had kept her out of a civic leadership role, it did not prevent her from feeling empowered to make positive change.

Aligning Perspectives with Socio-economic Categories

The stories and data on how citizens were involved and perceived their ability to participate in community change raised interesting questions. These story categories were clustered by economic demographics to look for relationships. Looking at the demographics of the interviewees was one way to sort the data to better understand patterns and themes in the data. Interview transcripts were sorted by economic category as per the indication of annual household income on the collected demographic sheet as represented in Figure 4.1, presented earlier in this manuscript.

The categorization of perspectives reveals stories from those who believe they are restricted from access to power, an exclusive social network, or have identified money as a controlling factor of involvement and influence. To explore the relationship of money and civic leadership, each coded transcript was reviewed and compared with others in the same annual household income category to seek similar themes. By rearranging coding information to be viewed by income categories, a new lens of perspective was provided that identified trends or themes. In doing so, an interesting theme appeared. Those interviewed that represented the lowest income categories (below $50,000) all had shared stories that were in the mixed response stories. Those in the lowest income category all saw some type of disconnect between themselves and civic leadership. Two described civic leadership as the work of the middle and upper class, and one described it as the work of government. The participant earning less than $25,000 a year indicated that those in poverty did not have a strong voice in civic issues and that civic leadership was the role of the middle and upper class. The second interview to suggest that civic leadership was a class issue fell in the $25,000 to $49,000 income range. What became evident through this sorting was that participant asserting that civic leadership is the role of

government was also in the $25,000 to $49,000 income range. The common factor in the lowest income categories was that all of the participants identified civic leadership as the role of someone else, either attributed to classism or as a concession of leadership to government.

Perspectives of civic leadership from poverty.

The following example is an excerpt from an interview with a participant from the lowest income category. The perspective asserting "that those in the lower class have little power in the community initially surfaced in an interview with a young mother of three who was working and going to college, yet still struggling to free herself from a lifetime of poverty. She was an active representative of a newly established community program to address poverty, and she shared the perspective of a social group often ignored:

> I have been in college off and on for 10 years, but I come from extreme poverty. So before that – I really had a grudge against middle class and things, so I look at things from a very different perspective. [...] Well, and see here, I am going to speak about things I don't know… my thoughts are of course, that it comes down to money. There are policies and I hear things about taxes and places where money should go and how it should be used – and I haven't got to be a part of those processes so I can only look at it from a colored point of view and sometimes it seems to me that certain people are involved in pushing things a certain way because they have power and they have money. Now do these people have good hearts? I am beginning to understand, probably so, but maybe they don't have a voice that they need to understand what truly is going to make a change for the greater good of all of us. […] but nobody from the lower class community or those subcultures or that are struggling with addictions, or – I mean certain things like

that, I mean, nobody is speaking up. (working mother in Circles™ program, interview, July 14, 2012)

Her interview acknowledges there may be reasons that those struggling with poverty and other issues are not actively seeking civic leadership roles, but it also points the concept that civic leadership is not something to which she or others struggling with poverty have access. She emphasizes that those with access to money and resources who can provide civic leadership are well intentioned, but they do not understand the needs or perspectives of those struggling in poverty. This point was reinforced in a joint interview with two co-directors of a poverty and recovery-related program.

In this community, civic leadership, a lot pertains to the middle and upper class. That is what most of the leadership typically has been. That is changing. The groups you have met with, and us are endeavoring to change that. But typically this is an incredibly wonderful, caring community. They are family oriented, Christian, caring community. But as for civic leadership, aside from your organizations, like Kiwanis and so forth that have always been reaching out to the silent community (the poor and needy), and they do that. But when I first came here and the years that I have worked in the community, the general opinion is that, that is for them. And "them" would be the middle and upper class in the community, the civic leadership. (Co-directors of recovery shelter, interview, July 27, 2012)

Later in the same interview, the conversation again turned to class distinction.

It has been the mindset of the poverty, and the middle class and the upper class, the three distinctions. There are silent rules in the classes. […] Poverty class mindset is relationship, but they tie to one another and hold each other down. The middle class

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know they can get an education, and go out and get the American dream. The wealthy

separate themselves from early on. This ties to civic leadership in town.

[Interviewer asks: "Is there strong class distinction in Wilhelm?"]

(Simultaneous response): Absolutely, yes.

 And you may not have heard this yet, but you are talking to some people that will tell

you – right now. (Co-directors of recovery shelter, interview, July 27, 2012)

These interviews represent a portion of the community that expressed the perception of classism,

and an experienced disconnect with civic leadership in the community. One interviewee falls

within the $25,000 - $49,000 annual income household income category, the other co-director

noted an annual household income of $75,000 - $99,000.

The third representative of the lowest income categories was highlighted earlier in this

chapter. He was the interviewee that saw local government as the provider of civic leadership,

and felt restricted in his ability to make change for the community.

The role of local government also emerged frequently in interviews of persons

representing the next income level, or $50,000 to $74,999 annual household income category.

Half of those in this income category mentioned the role of serving in local government as an

important avenue of civic leadership expression, along with service to local groups and

organizations. With sample size of only six interviews in this category, it is difficult to know

how much emphasis can be placed on this trend. However, three mentioned service through

local government as an important way to express civic leadership. Six interviewees were

represented in this income category, of which all but one was represented as positive/positive

responses, or both having been involved in community change and confident in their ability to

create change. Only one person in this income category represented a mixed response in relation to the earlier question.

Of the three interview participants from the $75,000 to $99,999 annual income category, and the two interview candidates that marked annual household income as "more than $100,000," all demonstrated both a history of involvement, and positive perspectives on their ability to make community change. These responses give insight into how citizens understand civic leadership, perceive their own ability to make change, and view the receptivity of the community field to change.

How Interview Participants Perceive Changes in Civic Leadership.

Reviewing how citizens perceived changes in civic leadership over time, involved looking at three interview question groups. The first group of questions asked participants to describe community changes that had occurred in Wilhelm in the 1990s. This question was followed up with clarification questions in relation to what community change they identified, typically, inquiry followed about the origin of the idea for change, who was involved with the change, and details about how the change involved the public. These questions were asked in conversation about the community changes participants described.

A second set of questions paralleled the first set of questions, only in relation to community changes that had happened since the year 2000. The same follow-up questions as for the 1990s allowed a deeper investigation into more recent change events.

A third set of questions revolved around the participants' characterization of opportunities for civic leadership. Again, depending on if they thought the opportunities were decreasing, static, or increasing, participants were asked to what they attribute that status.

Findings from interviewee perceptions of community change through time.

Asking citizens to reflect on community change events that happened 12 to 20 two years ago did not have good results. Some of the participants did not live in town at that time, and some were too young to give an accurate read on changes. Others noted that they were in a life situation at that time that prevented them from paying close attention. Raising kids, bad marriages, and dealing with poverty were three reasons interviewees gave for not really tuning into community changes. Of the 14 interviews, seven were unable to give an answer to this interview question. Of those that did answer, few were able to give any detail to the events of the decade. As one participant put it, "Things happen around you and it is gradual and things don't stand out. During the 1990s the economy was good, with regular annual growth" (Wilhelm business developer, interview, July 12, 2012).

The next sequenced question about changes since 2000 also brought limited response. This was because interview participants had already elaborated on projects in response to earlier questions. This is not to say that they could not think of anything. On the contrary, participants raised multiple examples of civic leadership projects within the community. As mentioned earlier, the string of three projects supported by sales tax were frequently mentioned. In addition to the "big three" sales tax projects, participants brought up a dozen other community projects, most that were grass-roots oriented.

Finally, participants were asked to characterize civic leadership opportunities in the community over the past 20 years. Results to this question were mixed. Four participants stated they thought opportunities were increasing, four participants were not sure, and five said they were stable. Each was asked their reason for why they classified it the way they did.

Responses for those that thought it was increasing stated that there were many groups, project start-ups, and new organizations to be involved with. Those that thought it was stable credited the community with having on-going opportunity. One participant noted, "If it is static, it is not stagnant" (Wilhelm business developer, interview, July 12, 2012).

Section 3: Overview of Focus Group Interviews

While the strength of the interview is delving into how individual participants understand and participate in civic leadership, the strength of the focus group is the group interaction with the focus on how civic leadership is manifested at the community level. Three focus group interviews were conducted in this research to gather data on citizen experiences with civic leadership. They are creatively titled, Focus Group 1, Focus Group 2, and Focus Group 3, and results from each session will be reported separately. One of the distinguishing features of each focus group interaction was the timeline activity. Where individual interviews do not afford the prompt of others comments and memories, the timeline allowed group interaction around a historical review of the community change events in Wilhelm. The focus group allowed for a shared group assessment of community changes within the community, and shared analysis of change events. Each focus group had a distinct 'personality' shaped by location, participants, and the direction of the conversation. Economic associations were not carried out for focus groups participants due to the inability to match demographic data sheets with voices in the focus group recordings. A compilation of economic demographics for all of the focus group participants is included in Figure 4.5.

Annual Household Income of Focus Group Participants

Annual Household Income of those that participated in all focus group interviews:

$25,000 - $49,999 = 15%

$50,000 - $74,999 = 35%

More than $100,000= 50%

Legend:
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- > $100,000
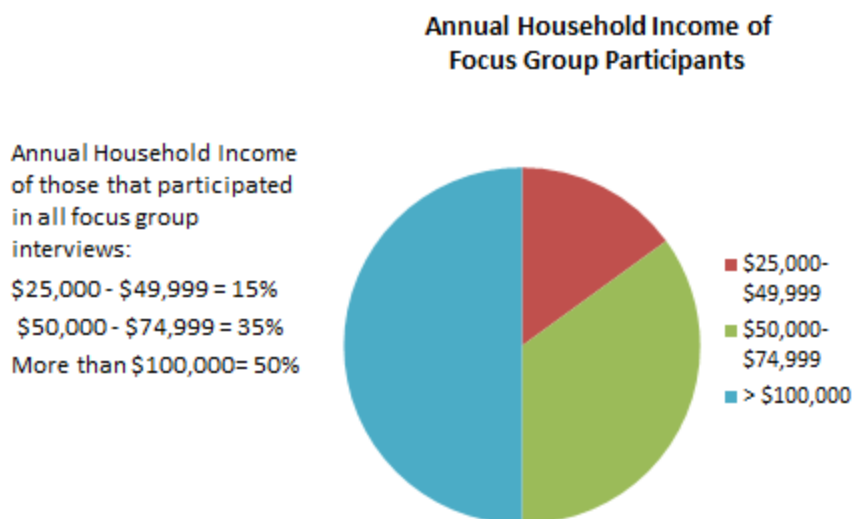
Figure 4.5 Annual Household Income for All Focus Group Participants.

The three focus group interviews surfaced 16 distinct new examples of projects or activities that represented civic leadership. As with the examples shared through individual interviews, these new civic leadership examples ranged broadly in how citizens were engaged in community. Like the examples from interviews, examples from the focus groups also included individual action, working with civic groups or community organizations, and working with local government. Specific examples of personally led action included cleaning up a neglected property; initiating services to address social needs; and creating a bike trail and trail club. Involvement with civic groups and formal committees included serving with the United Way, the school board, and the chamber of commerce. Examples of work with city government included serving on committees to rebuild the city pool and assisting with the creation of a police chaplain program.

Focus Group 1 Participant Data

The Wilhelm Chamber of Commerce office, located in a humble-looking building on Main Street, offered a cool retreat from the 100-degree summer sun. The brightly-lit Chamber board room had an open and welcoming feel about it as I double checked preparations for the focus group. I had moved chairs to allow adequate spacing around the large wooden table so that participants would be in a comfortable configuration for a conversation around the table. One microphone to record the interaction was standing in the center of the table and another, portable microphone was placed in front of the laptop computer at the end of the table. On a long wall of the room, chamber board photos had been taken down and replaced by a long stretch of white butcher paper titled "Community Change Timeline." On the paper was sketched a simple line with arrows pointing in both directions. A hash mark near the left end of the timeline was marked '1990.' In the middle of the timeline was a hash mark denoting '2000,' and on the right end of the timeline was the current date and a sketch drawing of people sitting around a table and the words "focus group." It was 11 a.m., and trays of sandwiches and vegetables had been set out next to tea and lemonade in anticipation of the participants.

Participants filed in professionally dressed, many on lunch break from office positions at community foundations, banks, business, and the hospital, and greeted each other in the board room. Each person made a paper nametag, picked up a plate of lunch, and reviewed the research consent forms as we waited to begin. The participants seemed to be familiar with the room and with each other, and there was a light-hearted air to the room. As the conversation started, I noted that the participants were quick to respond to my questions and to make comment on other's thoughts.

Of the seven participants involved in the first focus group, six of the participants were in the 39 to 64 age range. Only one indicated his age as 65 or older. Annual household income levels of this group included two who indicated "$25,000 to $49,900" and one who indicated "More than $100,000." The other four participants indicated their household income in the "$50,000 - $74,999." In this group of three males and four females, all indicated their ethnicity as white. Four indicated education levels at "bachelor's degree or higher" while three indicated their education at the "high school graduate" level. Demographics cards also indicated a diversity of religious affiliation. Responses included: Christian (3) Protestant (1) Covenant (1) and no indication of affiliation (2).

Focus Group 1 participants could be said to be a reflection of the "middle" population of Wilhelm by race, age, and income. The median age of Wilhelm residents is 38.5; mean income is $66,441; and 93% of the population is white (US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). By profession, participants represented office professionals and middle management in manufacturing, banking, health care, realty, and a retired college instructor.

Data collected related to Focus Group 1 included invitation lists, email correspondence, audio transcripts, a charted timeline, demographic forms, and interview references.

Findings from Focus Group 1

Findings Overview.

Several insights emerged from the first focus group and resulting data analysis. Emerging themes from Focus Group 1 reinforced several concepts about civic leadership identified in interviews. While community members described their understanding of civic

leadership in interviews as having roots in personal action and responsibility, focus group themes added the concept of *passion* to the personal involvement aspect of civic leadership. Supported themes from interviews include that civic leadership:

- Must be based on a passion or personal motivation
- Is expressed through action
- Involves working together
- Is a civic responsibility
- Is for the collective good

Focus Group 1 themes also reflected insight on how citizens are involved in civic leadership in the community with a strong emphasis on service through organizations and civic groups. In addition to affirming themes from interviews, Focus Group 1 participants added detail to what gives individuals more influence within the community. These arose in conversation in response to a question about participants' ability to make change, but they apply to what constitutes civic leadership. Specific influencers of ability to make civic change included:

- Money
- Social status, and
- Length of time in the community or a family history in the community

Focus Group 1 participants shared stories and examples of how they experienced or were involved in civic leadership. In addition to reinforcing community change examples identified in interviews, this focus group was able to identify four additional examples of community change events. The three avenues of engagement in civic leadership described in interviews were

reinforced in focus group one, although the most emphasized were self-initiative and service through organizations.

When assessing focus group data, understanding how citizens are involved with civic leadership and how they perceive their ability to participate in community change is based upon the response to the same questions as in interviews. However, except for responses to questions about describing civic leadership, and comments on personal ability to bring about change, focus group transcripts were reviewed as group conversation in response to the interview questions. In assessing this focus group, it was clear that members of this group were active initiators of community change, and believed in service through organizations.

Civic Leadership is understood as following a passion.

An emerging theme documented from Focus Group 1 was the association of civic leadership with personal motivation or passion. This idea was expanded upon by several participants in this focus group. As with the interview, participants in the focus group were asked the question, "What does the term civic leadership mean to you?" As participants took turns responding to the question, the word "passion" was specifically used in the descriptions of civic leadership by three different participants in this first focus group. Three of the seven group members mentioned the idea of "passion" as noted below:

> Participant 2: I think what makes [civic leadership] so successful is if you plug into what you are passionate about – no matter what it is in town, there are plenty to choose from, and so you pick what your passion is, and you plug in and become a leader.
>
> Participant 3: […] And it is common people who jump in there and follow their passions.
>
> Participant 7: They have all said everything ... you have to find your passion, and everybody finds it, and there is just so many diverse ways in town, but it is different than

management – and that makes sense. Because it is the little people. (Transcript of Focus

Group 1, July 18, 2012)

This perspective of working from a personal passion was a strong theme in this focus group and

seemed to be consistent with the context and understanding from interviews. This emphasis on

passion and service is consistent with the mission of the Leadership Wilhelm program as shared

by the community leadership program coordinator in an interview is: "Leadership Wilhelm

develops leaders by empowering all people by uniting their passions with service" (noted in

electronic artifacts from Leadership Wilhelm Program, shared October 2012). Both the theme of

"finding your passion" and "connecting to service" were emerging themes from this group.

Civic Leadership involvement means service in community organizations.

Civic leadership, defined as service to organizations, was a second theme that emerged.

This theme emerged initially in interviews and again in focus group one. Conversation in this

focus group both emphasized how participants saw themselves "fitting in" to existing

organizations and efforts, as a definition of civic leadership, and as a way to practice civic

leadership. As an example of how it was used to define civic leadership, when asked what the

term civic leadership meant to them, the first three responses were as follows:

Participant 1: For me it is plugging into those organizations and initiatives that drive the

community, be it commerce, be it nonprofits, it is plugging into what makes our

community what it is.

Participant 2: Plugging into community from A to Z there are nonprofits, clubs and

organizations, and even for profit entities.

Participant 3: I think what makes it so successful is if you plug into what you are passionate about – no matter what it is in town, there are plenty to choose from, and so you pick what your passion is, and you plug in and become a leader. (Transcript of Focus Group 1, July 18, 2012)

This group both defined civic leadership as serving in organizations and strongly associated how to practice civic leadership in the community as service through organizations. Examples included participants identifying different roles on boards and committees that they had served on, and the example of participating in the annual relay event for the American Cancer Society. As if to emphasize this point, the first respondent to the question, "How would you describe your ability to make change or provide leadership in or for the community?" was a younger female participant who replied, "My personal ability? Well mine would be that I am willing and able to serve on boards or committees to make changes. I am involved in many organizations right now. So that is one way that I can help" (Focus group 1 participant, July 18, 2012).

This comment emphasizes how civic leadership is exercised through volunteering or service to community organizations. Physical artifact data comparison confirmed the importance of service to community organizations. As detailed in chapter 3, participants in the focus group were compared to lists of a number of community organizations to gauge levels of community involvement. By comparing the participation of these organizations with the list of participants in Focus Group 1, it was found that four were members of the Optimist Club, and two of those were also represented in other organizational lists including the YMCA Board and the Hospital Improvement Committee. This was the most engaged group by comparison, with four of the seven participants serving in clubs and organizations. In addition to cross-checking involvement, the stories the participants told gave illustration of their involvement. Focus Group 1

participants gave examples of member involvement on the city pool project and by representing the perspectives of the elderly on committees and to the city. Participants were also directly involved in creating a recreation trail for the community, and in helping to bring a skate park to the community.

Capital assets contribute to how citizens view their ability to provide civic leadership.

Do community members believe they can bring about community change? In Focus Group 1, the answer was definitely yes, but focus group participants raised important ideas about how to make change effectively. This focus group supported the expanding understanding of factors that determine or affect the degree of influence one has in the community. As was first mentioned in interview findings, this focus group also identified 'influencers' of civic leadership and factors that affect an individual's ability to bring about change. Nearing the end of the first focus group, one of the older male participants opened up as if he was a little frustrated that we could talk about community power and change this long without stating the obvious.

> It is the same old story – passion. Can you make it? Yeah, you can make the change. It is passion, it is persistence, and it is knowing the connections. To many people, they can have passion, and they have persistence, but you can short-circuit it if you know the connections. You can get stuff done. And having worked 20 years in real estate, and being interested in politics and spending time before that in the industry, you know where the short cuts are, where the connections are and that makes a huge difference. (Realtor, focus group, July 18, 2012)

The group seemed in agreement with the speaker. As an experienced voice in the community, he knew how to use social networks and make connections with resources to bring about change. I took the opportunity to ask if the community had anyone or a specific group of people that were

community power holders. He answered and continued by identifying other assets that give citizens influence and power in Wilhelm:

> Of course. It is the same everywhere, money talks. It is kind of knowing where the resources are- that speeds things up. But the people in this room, you have got, what, eight of us, only one is an original community resident. The rest of us have come from the outside. Original residents have a definite advantage over us transplants. I have been here 26 years, and that still isn't long enough. As a long-time or original resident, you will get listened to sooner than one of the transplants. And money talks. [Names the president of a large industry in town] gets listened to. Money talks. But it is that way everywhere. It isn't just here. That is the facts of life. Money talks, and people in high places pull the chains. But you have got to know that a lot of the change you want to do in a place like this has nothing to do with pulling those chains, it has to do with little things – and that is where knowing the connections in a community really helps you out. (Realtor, Focus group 1, July 18, 2012)

Nodding with agreement, a second participant jumps in and says, "But, if you touch the passion of those folks that pull the chains..." (Retired college professor, focus group, July 18, 2012) and continues with a story of how a local organization was able to access resources because of knowing the interests of the industry president's wife. These two participants touched on several assets on which an individual can draw to have more influence within the community including financial capital (money), social capital (connections), cultural capital (local family history), and length of time living in the community. Their comments illustrate the concept of community field theory that describes a field of individual actors vying to influence one another.

Additionally, this focus group provided insight into how citizens felt about their ability to make community change and thoughts on a process to follow for successful efforts. The focus group seemed to provide a safe environment for discussion, and participants shared their thoughts openly. It was clear that several in this focus group felt the ability to take action to create needed community change. Several participants told stories of initiating civic leadership. Two members shared examples of their work to organize a group to support the development of a hiking and biking trail. Another gave an example of how he worked with youth to initiate the development of a skate park. Later, when asked to describe how they felt about their ability to make change in, or for, the community the group agreed they felt they could initiate change. An excerpt from the focus group conversation below expresses this:

Participant 1: I am confident that I could do pretty much anything I want in this town if I had a group of people buy in with me. Not that I am that accomplished or even that capable, of getting it done [others express agreement]

Participant 2: You don't have to be.

Participant 1: Yeah, you don't have to be. (More express agreement) You have a good idea, go with it.

Participant 3: If enough people are interested in your same passion or see the same need that needs to happen, just make your case. You can go to different organizations right now and do that. That is what we did. We just made our case. That is what I would do. If I saw a need, I would find an organization that is already in place, and if I could not find enough people to get on board, I would try to figure it out to make it myself. And that is what we did. (Transcript of Focus Group 1, July 18, 2012)

There was a sense of shared agreement that community change could be brought about by any individual passionate, persuasive, and able to get others involved in the effort. As Participant 3 in the above quote emphasizes, that is in fact how change has been made. Group members seemed confident in their ability to bring about meaningful change, and reflected on how this pattern of change was reflected in many of the community change events they observed in Wilhelm:

> Participant 5: But what you are saying is, that someone saw a need, which is what happens, you see a need for a service, a program, whatever, and you get a group that is just as passionate about it as you are, and you develop it into an organization, if you want to call it that - whether it be profit, nonprofit, whatever, the same goes with a civic organization or even a business. They all do the same - have the mindset, that role.
>
> Participant 2: Henry Ford – find a need a fill it. ("Find a need and fill it." echoed by another group member.)
>
> Participant 6: But even the need, what I like about it is the [recycle center] is meeting a need, but also the money they make they are giving back to the community - be it the [Homeless shelter, women's shelter] or whoever they have determined. I am involved in [the women's shelter] so that makes us feel good, we need all the help we can. It is people helping people. (Transcript of Focus Group 1, July 18, 2012)

This conversation seemed to summarize the emerging theme of what it is to be an initiator of community change.

The theme of civic leadership as a process emerged in the first focus group, as they highlighted both how they could bring about change, but also as they referenced other community change initiatives they had been involved with. The process elements emphasized

here includes; identifying a need, sharing it with others; and either tapping into an existing organization or organizing a group to address the need. It was also emphasized that people with social networks, history in the community and money have high influence in the community.

Changes in opportunities may be cyclical

Using the timeline to facilitate discussion about community change events helped provide a visual focus for the group. The focus group used the timeline to review community change events by organization and institution, and they spoke of what was happening to the banks, the school, the hospital, and industry through time. The three city sales tax-supported projects: the waterpark, the library, and the opera house were discussed at length. Some of the focus group participants had been on the community waterpark project initiative and actively supported the opera house. Drivers of change were identified by project, and often were identified as organizational expansion. For the sales tax supported projects, the group affirmed that these projects involved broad citizen involvement. This was affirmed by news articles and consistent with accounts of the changes from individual interviews.

When assessing community changes in leadership opportunities, there was a case made that opportunities are stable, that they are increasing, and the idea that opportunities are cyclical. The idea that opportunities were stable was brought up first to reflect that projects change, but opportunities for involvement continue. This was followed by a comment that noted an explosion of opportunities and services now available compared to 20 years ago. This was attributed, in part to the communication and awareness building that the Internet provides, and people acting within a larger geographic area.

A third perspective expressed was that the needs of a community change, and opportunities for civic leadership change with the needs. Those expressing this opinion referred to opportunities as cyclical.

Focus Group 2 Participant Data

The second focus group consisted of two females and four men. Four participants were in the 39 to 65 age range. Two participants were 65 years or older. Annual household income levels of this group included one who indicated "$25,000 to $49,900" and two who indicated "More than $100,000." The other three indicated "50,000 to $74,999." Most indicated their ethnicity as white, but two checked other. Five indicated education levels at "bachelor's degree or higher" while one indicated their education at the "high school graduate" level. Demographics cards also indicated a diversity of religious affiliation. Responses included: Christian (2) Catholic (2) Methodist (1) and Assembly of God (1). As noted earlier, the participants in this second focus group were united by a relationship that each provided some type of service or support to those that might be considered "unusual voices." Participants included directors or staff representatives from: a community health foundation, the YMCA, a homeless shelter, recovery programs, ministerial alliance, and a partnership of community churches working to provide front line service to those in need.

The county extension office is a concrete and metal building located in the heart of town. Our meeting space was a large open room with folding chairs and tables on a tile floor. I had arranged four long tables in a rectangle next to a wall where the paper for the timeline was waiting on the wall. The timeline was created in the same way as described for Focus Group 1. The focus group was scheduled to begin at 11 a.m., but some participants were tardy, so those in

attendance were asked to help themselves to begin lunch. A tray of sandwiches, bags of chips, and a tray of vegetables had been set out next to tea and lemonade.

Participants for this focus group were casually dressed, and two of the pastors in the room remarked that they had just left another meeting they had both attended. Each person made a nametag, picked up a plate of lunch, and reviewed the research consent forms as we waited to begin. One of the participants asked me to tell her again what the agenda was for the meeting, and how long I anticipated this would take. This group seemed less comfortable with each other socially, and anxious to get started. The sixth participant arrived about 15 minutes late. Most were just finishing their lunches, and the late-comer opted to eat after the focus group. We began around 11:18 a.m.

Perhaps because they had more members of their group that were older, this group seemed very comfortable identifying and talking about events over the past 20 years. An interesting dynamic from this group was an emphasis on societal trends. Using the timeline to facilitate discussion about community change events helped provide a visual focus for the group. Three of the participants had lived in the community before to the 1990s; two of them moved to the community in the '90s, and one arrived after 2000. This focus group reviewed the community by social trends. The three city bond fund supported projects; the waterpark, the library, and the opera house were discussed. Some of the focus group participants had been on the community waterpark project initiative.

By profession, this group was comprised of people who respond to social or human needs. Three of them were coordinating longer-running established organizations, and three of the participants were working in service programs they had initiated or that they were helping to get established. The stories from this focus group represented both grass–roots development of

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programs and programs that were seeking volunteers to carry out their programs. The timeline activity reviewed the history of the community using the social fabric as a context for the change that happened. Addressing present community needs was a unifying theme for this group. They are in touch with the needs of people of the community, and represented various levels of success in their ability to respond to needs or bring about change.

Data collected for Focus Group 2 included invitation lists, email correspondence, audio transcripts, a charted timeline, demographic forms, and interview references.

Findings from Focus Group 2

Several insights emerged from the second focus group and resulting data analysis. Emerging themes from Focus Group 2 reinforced several concepts about civic leadership already identified. While community members described their understanding of civic leadership as personal action and responsibility, Focus Group 2 themes emphasized that civic leadership serves the *collective good*, and that it requires working together in *collaboration*. As was seen previously, this focus group also reinforced the association of civic leadership and service through civic groups. Finally, an emerging theme from this focus group describes an approach to leading community change.

Focus group participants shared stories and examples of how they experienced or were involved in civic leadership. The three avenues of engagement in civic leadership, self-initiated service, service through government, and service through organizations, were again reinforced in Focus Group 2. This focus group identified eight examples of community change events. When assessing community changes in leadership opportunities, there was a case made that opportunities are increasing, and a case that they are decreasing.

Civic Leadership is understood as a personal responsibility

Several Focus Group 2 participants emphasized the aspect of personal responsibility through personal commitment when asked what the term civic leadership meant to them. As is evident in the following comments, these two affirmed how civic leadership requires a personal commitment to share skills and give of one's resources.

> Well for me, I think it means taking time from what we do in our own lives to look around us and see what the needs are for other community members, how we can improve, possibly through organizations, or something else - band together, come up with ideas to meet some of the needs that are present. My philosophy with the kids was always to try to make the world a little better for your having passed through it. (Coordinator of church services, Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012)

Another participant in the focus group added,

> Using the gifts, the resources and abilities that one might have in order to bring more goodness, more righteousness if you can use that word, more help, to the area to make it a better place to live for all. I guess that is what I would say. (Pastor, Focus Group 2 , July 25, 2012)

Civic Leadership is understood for the betterment of the community.

While both of these persons highlighted the personal commitment involved in civic leadership, their comments also directed those personal investments to the collective good. An emphasis on community betterment was expressed through; "to better the community as a whole" (participant in Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012), as well as an emphasis on working for the collective good was expressed through the statement "… to make it a better place to live for all"

(participant in Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012). There seemed to be agreement throughout the group, and both comments received head nods of agreement when expressed.

Civic Leadership is understood to involves collaboration.

The idea that civic leadership requires collaboration was also expressed in this focus group by several members. It was clear that civic leadership involves the shared collaborative work of community members. The point was emphasized by the coordinator of church services above in her comment about 'banding together' to meet needs. A pastor in this focus group struggled to describe the civic leader as a person, who creates collaboration on community projects,

> I view [a civic leader] as a – the leader of a civic center is this synergy. By which collaborative efforts happen. Collaborative efforts for um, quality of, so it is the core by which brings the efforts together to accomplish quality. (Pastor, Focus Group 2 , July 25, 2012)

The point was also made by an older gentleman who had many years of experience in the Wilhelm community when he shared, "To me it means taking time from your life and working with others in the community for a common goal of whatever the issues of that specific community are, to better the community as a whole" (Retired recovery services provider, Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012). The importance of collaboration surfaced again in the conversation in a pastor's response to the question, "How would you rate your ability to make change in/for the community?" As he was describing his ability, he noted the importance of working together:

> My perspective is that everyone around this table has a great amount of expertise and ability to bring about change. But it is all going to be about collaboration. Even in our different fields, whether it is, […] And everybody at this table, either now or in one other

area, but everyone here is a collaborator, and they know what needs to get done. (Church

leader, focus group 2, July 25, 2012)

Due to the context of the conversation, I interpreted his comments to refer to how individuals

used the help and support of others to bring about meaningful change. On an organizational

level, however, another participant noted, "I think there is a lot of collaboration," (Transcript of

Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012) and went on to describe how her work relies on more than 20

other churches and organizations to meet the needs of her clients. There was no disagreement

from the group about their interdependence and the importance of collaboration needed in the

community for success.

These three concepts of personal responsibility, work for community betterment, and

collaboration were key aspects that collectively defined what civic leadership meant to

community members.

In addition to these defining characteristics of personal involvement, participants also

spoke of civic leadership in the way that also described how it was expressed within the

community. More than just emphasizing collaboration between individuals some associated the

definition of civic leadership as involvement in the structures through which civic leadership

happens. Organizational involvement was mentioned as both a description of civic leadership

and an expression of it. The following comment is a response to the question, "What does the

term civic leadership mean to you?" A focus group participant noted, "I would have to say

when I hear "civic" I think more of – I am going to say institutions, like United Way or

whatever, but things that are already functioning" (Foundation representative, Focus Group 2,

July 25, 2012). This comment and the sensed agreement from Focus Group 2 members reinforce

the theme raised in Focus Group 1 of the strong association of civic leadership with service through community organizations.

How Focus Group 2 participants are involved in civic leadership in the community.

As noted above, participants in this focus group expressed the importance of involvement in civic leadership groups. Physical artifact data comparison confirmed this. The same organization lists referenced in focus group one analysis were used for comparison with Focus Group 2 to gauge levels of community involvement. By comparing the participation of these organizations with the list of participants in Focus Group 2, it was found that only one was represented in the comparison of community boards and membership lists referenced in chapter 3. Participants of this focus group were not as involved in other group membership, however, all but one of the participants of this focus group were directors or coordinators of church or community organizations.

In addition to cross-checking involvement, the stories the participants told gave illustration of their involvement. Focus Group 2 participants gave the following examples of their direct involvement in civic leadership activities:

- City Chaplaincy program for law enforcement and fire fighters

- Shelter house for homeless and recovering men

- YMCA swim program

- Circles™ program

- City waterpark project

- United Church Outreach

- Angel Tree Project

- Establishing a Christian school

For most of the participants, these community projects were in addition to their professional responsibilities.

How Focus Group 2 participants perceived their ability to bring about community change.

When this focus group was asked about their ability to make change in the community, several participants suggested their ability to make change or provide leadership was situational. One focus group participant responded to the question "How would you describe your current ability to make change or provide leadership in/for the community?" with a quick response of, "It depends on the change" (Transcript of Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012). This was quickly followed by a second focus group participant noting, "And the time and the need" (Transcript of Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012). The first respondent went on to note, "I mean I have been there where I hit my head against the wall and got zero response. And I have also been there when the time was right and the doors would open and there was significant response" (Transcript of Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012). This focus group conversation associated the public receptivity to change with the timing of the particular issue in relation to the larger economic and social situation.

The examples community members shared of change included grass-roots efforts and examples of working through existing power and organizational structure. Several examples of citizens bringing about community change without the benefit of existing structure were also shared.

The following script from the second focus group details how two shelter housing programs came into being within the community. Both projects were spearheaded by individuals.

We started Recovery House [a pseudonym] in '06. We started at the same time as the women's shelter house. We started in December of '06 they started the first part of '07. We actually have more longevity, but they are more known about. It was interesting, we did it very different. They became known in the community, gathered the finances, hired the staff; we started, live on a shoe-string, established the credibility, and now are trying to go. But for the most part people think we haven't existed, but we have been there. Really both of these came out of individuals. [Shelly] did the women's shelter with some support. The Baptist church was supportive initially. I did the [Recovery House]. The model we have developed, and will probably export to other cities, is not a church- based model it is a community based model. It has a board, and is a self-sustaining organization. (Housing program leader, Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012)

Every participant in this focus group shared a first-hand accounting of developing or supporting programs in the community which met a social or human need. This focus group identified eight new examples of community change events that had not been mentioned in interviews or the previous focus group.

Changes in civic leadership opportunities relate to social consciousness.

This focus group assessed the history of the community in light of social "consciousness" and the impacts broader social trends have had on the local community. The following excerpt from the focus group time line exercise will help the reader gain a sense of the discussion as this group reflected upon community change. In this section, several participants discuss the social context that has influenced activity in the community:

Participant 1: By comparison, what is interesting when you look at this, um, I mean you have got our program, you have [homeless shelter], you have the [poverty] program, the

whole social consciousness area in the last five to ten years has just really gone off the charts. By comparison, because I am hearing those examples then I look back to the '90s and I am saying, 'what was happening then?' And there just isn't anything comparable to what is happening now. But if you think social consciousness is the backdrop of this generation. So you almost have to take those and put down, what was the backdrop of the 1990s, and in one sense, the backdrop of the 1990s would have been the swimming pool. That would have been more characteristic of what was going on. I will tell you that there was a, in the ministerial alliance there was a more of a sense of joint worship, joint, you know, there was a lot of joint stuff we were trying to accomplish and etcetera. And that went on significantly in the first half, of the '90s, the first two-thirds of the '90s, and then around '97 somewhere in that range, that just totally fell apart and the alliance kind of lost.

Participant 2: I've heard of events done through the churches that had 1, 2, 3 thousand people that were sponsored by the ministerial alliance ... things, and they used the stadiums and whatever, I have heard of stuff like that.

Participant 3: So why did that stop?

Participant 1: Well, I was one of them beating my head against the wall, and, frankly I had just run out of steam, and I had been one of the activists back in that period, and to be honest, it just, and I am going to talk social backdrop, I think a lot of that was just the change, part of the reason these programs that we're talking right now are surfacing right now is social back drop. You have got a … societal values have drifted, and they are there, and so you say what were the societal values. And I would say if I were to go back

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to the early '90s there was this societal values of, Ok, let's come together, let's get together, etcetera

Participant 2: Hands across America,

Participant1: Yeah, well, guess what – you got promise keepers in the early 90s, (group agreement) that whole let's get together kind of big umbrella social movement as a social backdrop. And around 2000 you have about a five or six year what I am going to call chaos. You have Y2K mentality of everything kind of going KRRRK (ripping sound), for about five or six years there. (Transcript of Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012)

The focus group conversation expressed the perspective that things in the community were being guided by the larger societal trends that were influencing community behavior. In fact, while the group did represent a group that actively address community needs, they attribute that the success of that work is somewhat dependent on societal trends. Again, from the focus group, a pastor and housing program leader noted,

Let me just talk about where I was. I have been an activist at a lot of different points, in a lot of ways through my life. But if there is one thing I have heard in terms of message, it takes that activist to bring it to pass. But even though I was an activist in that area with the ministerial alliance, and community sort of stuff, there was a point at which my activism was no longer effective. Because that social backdrop moved, and when that social backdrop moved, it didn't matter how much I was beating my head against the wall, it was not happening. And so there are periods where activism in a social value area will flourish and when that social value area changes, you can have all the social activism you want, and it is not going to go anywhere (Pastor and housing project leader, Focus Group 2, July 25, 2012).

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When assessing community changes in civic leadership opportunities, participants in this focus group were in disagreement. Some of the group suggested that opportunities are increasing and suggested evidence of a growing number of service programs and organizations. Another made the case that opportunities are decreasing with an indication of several civic groups that are aging, and fewer younger community members are stepping up to serve.

Focus Group 3 Participant Data

In the third focus group six participants were in the 39to 65 age range. Only one indicated his age as 65 or above. In this group of six males and one female, annual household income levels of this group were all marked "More than $100,000." All indicated their ethnicity as white. All indicated education levels at "bachelor's degree or higher." Demographics cards indicated a diversity of religious affiliation. Responses included: Evangelical Christian (1) Protestant (1) Catholic (1) Methodist (2) and Lutheran (2). By profession, participants represented the vice president of industry, a certified public accountant, the superintendent of the school district, a lawyer, a career coordinator at a local college, a county economic development coordinator, and a bank administrator. Each person had decision-making authority for their organization. Six of the seven had been shared as a reference from the WBDC director; the seventh was an invitee from the first focus group whose schedule allowed participation in this focus group.

The room where we were meeting was called the Presidents Board Room, and was a richly decorated room located next to the administration offices at a local college. Because of the location of the room in a campus building, I was concerned that people would find it difficult to park, access the building, and locate the room. I was assured that it would not be an issue by those on campus, and indeed it turned out not to be. At promptly 11 a.m., participants arrived

and claimed one of the high-backed chairs around a huge round wooden meeting table. The college food service had catered a light lunch, and tea. The group seem accustomed to the room, to spending time in meetings together, and they used the time before we got started to connect with each other and talk business. One microphone to record the interaction was standing in the center of the table and another, portable microphone was placed in front of the laptop computer at the table. Along the brick wall of the room, behind my chair, campus photos had been removed and replaced by a long stretch of white butcher paper titled "Community Change Timeline" similar to the previous focus groups.

Data collected for Focus Group 3 included invitation lists, email correspondence, audio transcripts, a charted timeline, demographic forms, and interview references.

Findings from Focus Group 3

Focus Group 3 also supported earlier evidence presented regarding how citizens understand civic leadership. Consistent with earlier findings, Focus Group 3 data supports the idea of civic leadership as an action stemming from personal responsibility for the betterment of the community. Focus Group 3 themes emphasized that civic leadership requires work *to make the community better* and working together in *collaboration*. While community members described their understanding of civic leadership as personal action and responsibility, there was a strong emphasis on these collective and collaborative aspects of civic leadership.

Focus group participants shared stories and examples of how they experienced or were involved in civic leadership. Focus Group 3 participants all expressed a high perception of ability to participate in, and create meaningful community change. Participants in this focus group were connected to civic leadership through their work and each held positional authority. Most of the examples of community engagement for civic leadership from this group involved creating

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opportunities for broad community engagement. Another seemingly contradictory theme expressed was the idea of repressing dissent.

When assessing community level changes of civic leadership opportunities, there was agreement that there is continued opportunity and the group made reference to a community "culture" of civic leadership.

Civic Leadership is understood as involvement to make the community better.

When describing civic leadership, Focus Group 3 participants also placed an emphasis on personal responsibility as the other focus groups had. In addition, this focus group emphasized the concept of involvement and participation in community matters "to make it better." In the excerpt from the transcript below, you will see how the ideas of acting out of personal responsibility for the collective good are reflected:

> I think of it more from the civic involvement, civic participation. You know, taking it upon yourself to be involved in community affairs. Seems like sometimes the leadership role evolves out of that civic participation. (Business professional, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)
>
> I was going to say basically the same thing, for me it is just community involvement. For me, any place where I have lived, I have wanted to be involved in that particular area - just wanted to improve the conditions around me, whether that is a dorm, or a campus, or a town. Being involved to make it better (Education professional, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012).
>
> I don't know, I think at some level, at the lowest level, you are trying, you participate and are involved because you are trying to validate why you are living here. You know, I am

here, and I am going to make it better. It's like, why would anyone pick out a little town in central Kansas to live in, but we know what we have here, and you have got to try to improve it. (Industry leader, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

These comments were in response to the question, "what does civic leadership mean to you?" and the responses supported the emerging theme of personal involvement with particular emphasis on taking action for the betterment of the community. The concept of collaboration was also supported in this focus group. The idea of collaboration came up later in the focus group, but was agreed to be a key element of the success of the community. The following excerpt from the focus group emphasizes this:

Participant 1: Well I started to say a few minutes ago, one thing that has been indicative is collaboration. I have not used that word today.

Participant 2: That is huge. (heads nod in agreement around the table)

Participant 1: But these are all vastly different projects, yet they have required a great deal of collaboration on the part of many different institutions or groups over time, and it think that those opportunities for collaboration continue to this day (Other participants nod and agree) (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012).

Later in the focus group, it was emphasized again to highlight the importance and benefit of collaboration:

Participant 1: But that collaboration is huge.

Participant 2: It's huge.

Participant 1: It can't be understated.

Participant 2: It is almost a, above the rest of that stuff.

Participant 1: I mean for example, 10 years ago the colleges and the school district went

together on athletic facilities and renewing that. That is a multimillion dollar project and

we couldn't have that nice of a facility, and the college couldn't either, but together we

could do that. Same thing with our (the schools) relationship with the Wilhelm

Recreation commission, we have done some things with baseball, things that we just

couldn't do separately. There is lots of that. You have to bring people together to make

it happen. I think that slows us down sometimes. But it causes us to be cautious, not to

be speculative, that causes, though, when it is done, it is well thought out and it has a lot

of support usually by the time it happens. (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

In addition to describing the importance of collaboration, participants in Focus Group 3 spoke of

civic leadership as a part of the community culture. This focus group spoke of the civic

leadership of the community as something they recognize as a part of their heritage, their culture.

Civic leadership for this group was both an attitude and value, and seemed to represent

something they have been called to keep watch over and sustain. To illustrate this perception, I

will share an answer the group gave when asked:

"Tell me a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community — what does civic

leadership look like?" The first person to speak looked around the room, and then explained to

me:

It is a culture. […] it is a culture that started well – even before us, this community was

going to be prideful, and grow, and I think people that have come since that, since the

start of our own utility company and things, have taken it upon ourselves that we need to

do that, it is our job to perpetuate that, to grow that, to culture, to nurture that. […] We

are a very conservative community, but we are very forward thinking about how we want

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to go about growth, and how we go about our lifestyle, and I think that you sense that

when you move here, and it makes it, when you start to become part of the civic

leadership in the development of that, you want to really do your part in the development

of that, […] we are a very prideful community. We try to do the best in everything that

we do given our resources and I really think that that is unique. When you have everyone

kind of moving in the same – and not that we all always agree, but we are kind of all

moving in the same direction for what is best for the community. (WBDC chairperson,

Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

The idea of a "culture" of civic leadership was supported in comments from individual

interviews. The idea was also brought up again in this focus group when asked about changes in

civic leadership through time.

Civic Leadership involvement through professional engagement.

Focus Group 3 participants were business and organizational leaders. By invitation, they

represented contacts that had been identified through the Wilhelm Business Development

Company, of which one participant was the board chair. Each of the participants had been

involved in the development of the Wilhelm economic visioning process according to a

document called the "Economic Development Strategic Action Plan" for Wilhelm, Kansas

compiled August 1, 2011 by a consulting firm from Chico, CA. This document was shared both

physically and electronically from the Wilhelm Business Development Company.

As detailed in chapter 3, participants in the focus group were compared to lists of a

number of community organizations to gauge levels of community involvement. By comparing

the participation of these organizations with the list of participants in Focus Group 3, it was

found that only two appeared as members of the identified groups.

In addition to cross-checking involvement, the stories the participants told gave illustration of their involvement. Focus Group 3 participants gave the following examples of their direct involvement in civic leadership activities:

- School Board
- Promotion of "civics" through public school
- Small Business Development
- County Government,
- WBDC Economic Strategic Action Plan
- County Economic Development

For most of the participants, these community projects were in association with their professional responsibilities.

Focus Group 3 participants perceive self-confidence and experience in civic leadership

Focus Group 3 participants expressed confidence that they were able to bring about change within the community. The following excerpt from Focus Group 3 reflects this confidence.

Participant 1: All of us sitting at the table, and all of us in all of these organizations feel like we have the opportunity to not only participate, but to be heard. And our ideas are recognized and listened to. I think all of us have the opportunity to, to be heard, and to participate. And I think that's terrific.

Participant 2: I think all of us feel like we can have an impact. I think we all know that we need each other. […] So when you understand that we all give so that we all … it is a collaboration synergy that happens. I wouldn't think that anyone in leadership doesn't feel like they can make a difference in this community.

Participant 3: I think that our, this initiative with WBDC, we are trying to foster that by

... [makes reference to WBDC Economic Strategic Action Plan] So that, this thrust was

to get as many people involved as possible, and maybe a couple three champions will

come out and work on housing. So if you have a burning desire, and want to, there is a

guarantee there is opportunity. That is the idea. No one is in the way of anybody taking

the initiative and in fact that is what we are trying to encourage. A lot of times people

don't get involved, because they think, well I don't know how to do it, or whatever. Well

I don't think that's a problem here – if you have some desire, you can find something to

do. (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

In addition to the expressed openness to encourage involvement in bringing about community

change, a large-scale effort has also been launched to involve others through the WBDC

Economic Strategic Action Planning process. The extent of involvement is confirmed both

through reference in individual interviews, and the "Economic Development Strategic Action

Plan" for Wilhelm, Kansas compiled August 1, 2011.

Another interesting insight for this research relates to citizen ability to create meaningful

change in the community. Focus Group 3 conversations raised another aspect of involvement on

community change. Conversation in this focus group highlighted the idea of looking out for the

interests of the community. This was raised by one of the business leaders and affirmed by

another participant in the focus

Participant 1: Another thing that is important, from a leadership standpoint is throughout

this process maybe even before this, we have had excellent progressive city and county

commissioners.

Participant 2: There you go.

Participant 1: Which has a huge effect on all the above. In terms of, there are no nay-sayers there. And that is huge. One bad board can screw up a lot of things. We haven't had any crusaders or anything, just the opposite, and they kind of get the idea too, they have figured out this, they have got a pretty good thing here, don't screw it up. And that goes clearly across those 20 some years there. (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

Comments reflected not only their ability to bring about change, but also hinted to the ability to suppress opposing perspectives. To explore that further, the group was asked: "How does a community sustain a sympathetic local government?" Several participants responded:

Participant 1: Well because you help, you encourage people that would be, to do the right kind of job, to run and you make sure they get elected. Because, that is not something you can just let happen, or else, something bad will happen to you.

Participant 2: Well yeah, I think our leaders are forward thinking but they are fairly moderate. There is not, there's not anybody that's just real off-the charts liberal, and there is no one off the charts conservative either, it is kind of status quo of sorts.

Participant 3: Well they recognize success (This is echoed by another in the room: "Yeah, they recognize success") and how it's worked (again, another elaborates: 'They work to maintain it") and they continue to maintain it and continue to work towards that.

Participant 1: I think there is a history of a lot of folks who were in business, whatever, it came time to retire, and they all kind of, almost like I have a duty to go be on this city commission, so they – I am not sure anybody aspires to that, but people encourage them, yeah you have got to do this because your smart and common sense and get in there and help us. (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

While others had expressed opportunity for involvement, this was the first evidence of anyone speaking of controlling access or involvement, or discouraging 'nay-sayers'.

Community civic leadership opportunities are seen as stable.

When asked to identify community changes along a timeline, rather than identifying organizational shifts through time like focus group one had done, or identifying social values changes and how they impact social needs programs as did Focus Group 2 had done, this group presented a third approach. They began by talking about agricultural trends, industry trends, and changes in markets. They began to share demographics of the community, and note what housing changes have occurred, what business development changes occurred, and what impact each of those changes had on the local school enrollment and health care. During the timeline session they noted the three city sales tax supported projects; the waterpark, the library, and the opera house as community change events. When asked about who was behind these project ideas, they referred to them as 'family initiated' events, which I interpreted as a way of expressing they were not organizationally driven. An economic development professional explained:

> Like the pool project and the opera house project both of those were very grass root
>
> projects of just a group of people who thought something needed to happen. Well the
>
> pool project was primarily some families that enjoyed the pool, and had kids on the swim
>
> team and did a good job of just going from group to group, individual families to
>
> individual families growing support for the increased sales tax for that project. And the
>
> opera house was just persistent. That was just a small group of people that didn't want
>
> that building to fail. (Economic development professional, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012)

Time line transcripts reflect an emphasis on demographic and economic analysis of changes in the community. When asked how they would characterize civic leadership opportunities over time, the group agreed that they were, as one focus group participant mentioned, "stable at a minimum" (Transcript of Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012).

Section 4: Unstructured Interviews, Observations, and Physical Artifacts

Intermittent visits to the community of Wilhelm were made during the five months of research study. Written and audio field notes were recorded while in the community and often in the car after leaving the community. Other than time in interviews and focus groups, I also spent time driving around town to be familiar with areas of wealth, and areas of poverty. I was intentional to spend time in the community in ways that I could observe interactions of people. I spent time in a coffee shop on main street, visited a different place to eat each day in the community, and explored stores, art galleries, parks, and public buildings. I was in three churches, and attended a volunteer dinner and community Circles™ meeting. I spent an afternoon at the college touring an annual community car show. Several afternoons were spent out of the summer sun in the public library looking through community records. I attended the annual Graduation Celebration Day (a pseudonym) and spent the day visiting with people at the park and on Main Street. I also spent time visiting possible locations for focus groups and visited with people about this project and research needs at the County Research and Extension office, Court house, Public Library, Churches, Coffee shop, Convention and Visitors Bureau office, Wilhelm Business Development Office, Opera house, and College campus. Once locations were identified for the focus group sessions, I visited restaurants and cafes and grocery stores about catering a lunch.

Data from Unstructured Interviews and Observation.

Unstructured interviews.

As indicated above, I was able to involve citizens in a limited number of unstructured conversations. These spontaneous "interviews" were intended to seek a "citizen on the street perspective" and to seek input to questions or check impressions. This informal "background" assessment of the community lends context to the other interviews and emerging themes. The conversations were not recorded other than through reflections on the conversations in my field notes. In this section, I will share three important unstructured interviews, and two community observations.

Hispanic waiter unstructured interview.

I had stopped in Mexican restaurant for dinner. It was clear that I was the last customer of the day, and staff were clearing the cash register and straightening chairs while waiting for me to finish. My host was a Hispanic man that looked to be in his mid-thirties and spoke broken English. I found in the conversation that I would need to re-ask questions using different words if he was quiet or looked at me uncertainly. In our conversation, he shared that he had been in Wilhelm for about three years, and did not mind it. When I asked if he was involved in the community, he said no, that there was not much to do in town. He remarked that the opportunities for recreation and nightlife were very limited, and that Wilhelm was a "really good place to save money" (Waiter at restaurant, personal communication, June 28, 2012). He indicated that he preferred to "just work" in the community, so he did not mind the quiet community.

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Circles™ meeting unstructured interview.

A second important experience that included informal interaction in Wilhelm was a visit to a Circles™ meeting. The national program, called The Circles™ Campaign is an initiative that works to match people in poverty with a support network. Following a Bridges out of Poverty training, The Circles™ initiative provides a structure to match families working to get out of poverty and several middle and upper income "allies" who lend them support. The Circles™ motto, "A hand up, not a hand out" had been mentioned by participants in two focus groups, and by five interview participants. This gave me the impression that the organizations efforts were well known in the community. The structure of the program places the person in poverty in a leadership position. It is the person struggling with poverty issues who selects the support network of wealthier "allies" that they will work with. The program requires participants to go through an awareness building session to help them understand the living realities between people willing to help each other. The Circles™ meeting I attended in July involved about eight circle leaders, each working with a team of allies with whom they have partnered. Also at the meeting were representatives from other communities considering launching similar programs, and youth from the Methodist Church served the meal.

While at the meeting, I visited with a young mother in the program who was wrestling with the dilemma of having car troubles that kept her from getting to work. The allies at the table listened empathetically and explored with her the potential alternatives she might consider. After dinner, the children went with the youth group and the adults moved their chairs to a circle where they shared announcements, introductions, stories and "appreciations" around the circle. Two of the Circles™ leaders shared stories of what brought them to the program, and what was working for them. After the "circle" portion of the meeting, the group moved back to the round

tables where a circle leader and allies answered questions about the program with the visitors. The meeting provided my research a connection with people in poverty, allies working to address poverty, and a contact with the program coordinator.

Ministerial alliance unstructured interview.

A third noteworthy unstructured interview was with the pastor of a local church who was the coordinator of the community Ministerial Alliance. I had called on him to talk about the Ministerial Alliance, the work they do, and to seek connections with service providers in the community who may have perspectives on civic leadership from working with different audiences. In meeting with the pastor, I learned of many programs around the community and gained a list of names of service providers to invite to a focus group. I also invited the pastor to the focus group to formally capture his perspectives.

These unplanned conversation opportunities provided limited physical artifact data collection, but were valuable to help the researcher gain perspectives from other citizens in the community. The conversation with the Hispanic waiter and the conversation with those individuals in poverty reinforced that civic leadership is not always a priority for those that are struggling. The interviews emphasized physical, language, and opportunity barriers of getting involved with community level issues. This is what Theodori (2008) referred to as the; "micro-level manifestations of the structural constraints to collective action" as he noted that personal money issues and lack of free time were noted as "constraints that impede the emergence of community" (p. 107).

Observations from Wilhelm.

My first impressions of the community were that the people of Wilhelm were open and receptive to outsiders. When responding to a request for involvement in research, the receptivity of participants could range from high reluctance for involvement to receptive and willing to share information and ideas about the community. I found this community to be the latter. Several times, participants called me to thank me for the written invitation to the focus group, even if only to express their regrets for not being able to participate. In spite of conflicting schedules, several sought alternative times to meet. Many of the residents were very willing to participate, even to visit on weekends or after regular work hours.

The first important observation event in my visits to Wilhelm was a visit to a community-wide festival. In early interviews, this community festival was touted as the biggest event of the year for the community. Spanning a full week, the event involved skits, bands, a parade, activities, games, and even a carnival. Some of the events were held at the school, some in the city parks, and some on Main Street. As one county employee emphasized, "There are 30,000 people that come to this town, and that parade will be blocks, I mean the whole Main Street will be – I suppose the people will be ten to twelve people deep. [This event] is a perfect example of civic leadership." And it was. The events planning team is divided into committees, and there are at least ten committees listed on the event web site. As I walked through the town that day, it was obvious from the shirts and activity that this was a colossal volunteer led event. Volunteers were leading events, parking cars, directing traffic, and providing schedules. There were volunteers in the park leading youth events, and serving food in booths for the churches and civic groups. School, businesses, and city offices were closed for the morning of the parade, but downtown businesses took advantage of the crowds for sales during the week. Coordination and

support of this city wide event was, indeed an exceptional opportunity for service to the community.

The second community observational highlight is in relation to how the local government was working with citizens. In addition to hosting regular open commission meetings on Monday nights, the city staff actively made efforts to engage citizens. The community newspaper announced a series of meetings by city council and staff for the purpose of sharing and listening to community ideas and feedback on local initiatives. A number of meetings, called "listening events", had the same schedule, but were hosted at various times of the week. According to the elected official interviewed, the variety of meeting times was intended to accommodate different working and life schedules so people could participate. When ordinances were changing, or there were events that may be controversial, the mayor and city commission make an effort to engage citizens. One example that struck me as fair and illustrative of the relationship between local government and the people, was an example of a community change that was put into effect on an experimental basis. A solution of adding bicycling lanes to the Main Street was to transform a two-lane road by simply repainting the street to allow a center turn lane, and wider bicycle lanes on the sides of the street. Met with mixed support, the city proposed an experimental test period to see if citizens would like the new format. If not, the promise was made to revert to the old way after a year. Several of the interviewed participants mentioned this open approach, and noted that the local government seemed "open". This, in combination with city officials purposefully recruiting citizens to be represented on task force projects, and opening opportunities for citizens to step forward and serve. These observations led me to believe that the local government was working hard to gain and maintain the trust of the citizens of the community.

Findings from observations.

An email in response to a member-check summary I had sent to an interviewee simply stated, "The main thing to remember when you're dealing with Wilhelm is that there are all these myths. Don't drink the Kool-Aid!" (Wilhelm resident, personal communication, July 30, 2012) "Don't Drink the Kool-Aid" was an expression that referred to not blindly going along without critical examination of what was really happening in the community. This email prompted another evaluative review to examine what 'myths' of Wilhelm he was referring to. In review of the stories that were told, what stories do the citizens of Wilhelm tell about themselves? The following four community 'myths' emerged, not in response to a specific interview question, but rather as themes that surfaced in the way participants talked about their community:

1.) *This community is recession proof.* This idea came up initially in an interview with a city leader that expressed that the community did not experience the depression like other places because the discovery of oil in the area and development of the oil industry at that time carried them through. I also heard it expressed in the first focus group from an older community member who said, "Wilhelm weathered the depression, because of the business and industry" (Focus Group 2 Transcripts, July 18, 2012). While these comments are based on the events of history, the idea of the community's economic immunity has taken on mythical proportions. Not only are city leaders saying and believing it, the young mother interviewed who was struggling with poverty told me matter-of-factly, "We never had a depression, we still don't have a recession, because of the refinery and oil"(Interview, July 14, 2012). Likewise, the business leaders in the third focus group, when reflecting on success of the community, spoke about their diversification of investment in agriculture, industry and oil; "Not only does it get people to come here, it helps us to be recession proof. When things are bad in ag., oil is good, industry, and

that is created a lot by the cost climate here" (Focus Group 3 transcript, July 30, 2012).

Residents of Wilhelm have embraced the myth that the community has economic immunity

because of the oil industry; their diversified development interests, or because of the stability of

manufacturing and industry.

2.) *Wilhelm does not have a homeless issue.* The concept of couch-homeless was raised

in two interviews and a focus group. Several people shared that Wilhelm does not have an issue

with homeless people on the street. A participant in the second focus group noted; "One city

leader said we don't have homeless here in Wilhelm. We only have one person on the street. But

there are many that are couch-homeless. They are living on some friends couch" (Focus Group 2

Transcripts, July 18, 2012). The third time I heard someone explain the term couch-homeless to

me, it occurred to me that there was a group of individuals who were introducing a new reality to

the community to shift the myth that homelessness was not an issue.

3.) *We collaborate.* Collaboration was a theme in earlier data that surfaced when

participants spoke of what civic leadership is, and how it is done. Here, however, is an

expression of how they think of themselves as a community. There is a self-impression that the

people of Wilhelm are great collaborators. The director of the Wilhelm Business Development

Committee described it best when he said, "If you are around anywhere, and this is true – it

sounds like chamber of commerce gibberish, but there is something special about Wilhelm -

everybody works together" (Interview transcripts, July12, 2012). There is a belief that

collaboration is important and a shared value of the community. The Director of the Chamber of

Commerce told me, "I don't say this just because I have been here, but I think we are a very

collaborative thinking community" (Interview transcripts, June 3, 2012). Likewise, an elected

city leader noted in his interview that, "I don't know what the root of it is, but we have been able

to maintain a collaborative environment" (Business development coordinator, interview, July 12, 2012). Later in the same interview, he noted,

> The fact of the matter is that we have a collaborative mind set. We have had a
> collaborative mind set we have had people 50 -60 years ago that were visionaries – and it
> is our duty to keep that moving forward, to keep that vision alive, to keep this
> collaborative effort going forward so that we are the best community in the state.
> Success breeds success (Business development coordinator, interview, July 12, 2012).

This self-perception of being good collaborators also was raised in the focus groups. Many residents of Wilhelm have adopted the idea that they are good collaborators.

4.) *We have a "culture of civic leadership."* A fourth community self-belief that surfaced repeatedly in this study is an understanding that Wilhelm, as a community, has a "culture" of civic leadership. As noted earlier in this chapter four, the idea of culture was referenced several times, and was elaborated on in Focus Group 3. It is reiterated here, because more than a recurring theme, having a "culture of civic leadership" is a story that the community tells about itself. It has become part of the mythology of the community. Focus Group 3 elaborated on the idea of civic leadership being a culture in the community:

> Participant 1: It is almost an expectation. I was born and raised here. So, it is the desire
> to give back to the community. But where that came from ... I didn't wake up one day
> and say, "oh I want to give back to the community" I just seen [sic] it practiced by those
> folks that were in leadership. (Wilhelm business professional, Focus Group 3, July 30,
> 2012)
> Participant 2: It is like a heritage of leadership, you know, and we are living up to that.
> Since I moved here, I have been here 12 years, since I moved here, it is like, well, ok, you

can see the history, it is laid out in front of you throughout town. And the opportunity to

participate, somewhat, I kind of feel like it is an obligation to participate. An

expectation. And I think that culture has been around a long time, certainly. (Wilhelm

financial advisor, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012).

Participant 3: I moved here in 1988. And we have a culture of progress here, and so you

either get, you buy into it. Or it is so persuasive that no one is negative, no one fights it.

I think because of the culture, that is just the way we do it. Whether that is pride, there is

a lot of momentum there (Banker, Focus Group 3, July 30, 2012).

Highlighting these four meta-themes is not to argue their validity. Inclusion is important to the

reader to understand how these 'myths' represent how citizens see themselves, and how they see

the community.

Physical artifact review and findings.

The physical artifact resources listed in chapter three lists and data sources were reviewed

for themes of citizen involvement and participation. Several key documents and searches were

insightful to this research.

Community Economic Development Action Plan.

A document called the *"Economic Development Strategic Action Plan"* for Wilhelm,

Kansas compiled August 1, 2011 by a private consulting firm from California, was shared both

physically and electronically from the Wilhelm Business Development Company. This

document is a strategic planning document for the community of Wilhelm. As noted in the

section called *The Need for a Comprehensive Economic Development Approach in Wilhelm*, the

community was operating without a comprehensive plan related to Wilhelm's economy. The

planning process documented in this strategic plan is intended to be comprehensive for the community. The document states:

> This plan represents an umbrella economic development strategy that goes beyond organizational boxes to achieve a common vision for Wilhelm's economy. […] The overall purpose is to bring together public and private sectors, nonprofits, and individuals into a network that can seamlessly implement strategies that make the most of Wilhelm's assets, mitigate any weaknesses, and maximize the ongoing activities and opportunities open to Wilhelm (Economic Development Strategic Action Plan. 2011. p. 3 of 26).

Supported by both the city of Wilhelm and the Wilhelm Business Development Company, the planning process was touted to be very inclusive. In his interview, the elected city representative suggested that one hundred people participated in the planning process. The Director of the WBDC noted in his interview that eighty were in attendance at the first visioning session. The planning document itself contained a list of fifty individuals representing organizations and serving on committees for five strategic initiatives. The names and organizations listed were mostly local Wilhelm organizations, but also included representation from state agencies and outside economic development or program resource providers. The list of local participants involved individuals representing business and industry, but also city, school, and college representatives. It was clear that there had been a purposeful effort to be inclusive of community interests in this planning process, including representatives from housing and education. It was also clear that the interests driving the planning process were economic interests, and the goals established in the planning document are goals relating to the growth of local business and industry.

Lists of interview referrals.

Interview referrals comprise a second important set of physical artifact data. As I met with interview and focus group participants, I collected a list of referrals provided by participants. The data from these lists is insightful when viewed as a roadmap to the community, and influenced how this research was conducted. In this section, I will detail the contact source and the reference connections made by each.

The first interview with the elected city official resulted in a list of fourteen referral names. The list was comprised primarily of citizens identified by positions within the community. This list contained names of bankers, realtors, and business owners, but also included the names of the Community Foundation Director, Main Street Program Coordinator, Chamber Director, and the Director of the United Way.

The second interview with the County Research and Extension Agent generated a list of twelve contact names. Four names were duplicate referrals s from the first list of recommended contacts. The duplicated positions included the Director of the Community Foundation, Main Street Program Coordinator, Chamber Director, and the Director of the United Way.

The interview with the Chamber Director and Wilhelm Leadership Program Director was a recommended referral from the first two interviews. This Interview provided a list of 18 previous leadership program graduates to contact for a focus group. This list had no repeats from earlier suggested contacts.

These first three contacts into the community had generated a list of forty-four referral names, only four of which were duplicate referrals. The lists of recommended contacts to discuss civic leadership showed little duplication. This was a first indication of a broad network of community leadership.

As interviews continued, the fifth interview led me to the coordinator of the Wilhelm Ministerial Alliance. I contacted the coordinator of the Ministerial Alliance, and in an informal interview, received a list of eight names or positions that serve the needy in Wilhelm. Of those eight names, the Director of the United Way, and the Director of the community foundation were repeat recommendations. This list of connections from the ministerial alliance coordinator helped form the list of candidates for the second focus group.

The sixth interview was a business leader with the Wilhelm Business Development Company who had been recommended by the city official in the first interview. This interview led to a list of ten names suggested contacts for a focus group, only two of which were repeated contacts from the first interview.

The seventh person interviewed was a community service provider working on family health issues. She had been on the referral list provided by the Chamber Director. She provided an additional contact of a person working her way out of poverty, which snow-balled two additional interviews.

These recommended contact lists provide important physical artifact data. By tracking numbers of contacts, and cross-referencing referrals, I was able to gain a broader community level perspective on networks and connections. Of the seventy-three name referrals collected through this process, only five names were repeat recommendations. The low redundancy in referrals may be an indication of the "breadth" of networks this study touched, and diversity of networks in this rural community.

Seeking connections and involvement on community boards and committees.

A second important collection of lists in physical artifacts includes lists of several community boards and committees. A list was compiled of persons serving on boards and

committees from the following community organizations to test community connections. Through this informal search, I sought to learn more about the level of community involvement of the participants in this study and to connect names and organizations with participants in the study. The following lists were accessed and referenced for study participants.

- Wilhelm Chamber of Commerce

- Wilhelm Business Development Committee

- Wilhelm Main Street organization

- County Small Business Development Association

- Wilhelm city commission

- Wilhelm county commission

- District School Board

- Hospital improvement committee

- Board of Trustees for the local retirement community

- Board of trustees for Wilhelm College

- Wilhelm Recreation Commission

- Optimists Club

- YMCA Board.

The names of interview and focus group participants in this study were compared to the above organization lists. Of the interviewed participants in this research, the elected city official was a Wilhelm City Council member, and the two program staff from the Chamber and the Wilhelm Business Development Company served in an advisory role to the Small Business Development Association. A third key informant was involved in the Optimist club. Of the 14 research participants in this study, only one community organization membership and two serving in advisory positions outside of their employment were evident.

The same connection search was completed for focus group members. Of the twenty focus group participants, 8 were serving on community boards or committees. This is an un-scientific analysis, however, it is noteworthy. By looking at a sampling of organizational affiliation within the community, it was evident that the participants in this study were not a small elite group of people that were not cross-influencing boards and committees across the community.

Section 5: Summary of Research Findings

Overall responses to this research were reviewed and summarized to address the research questions of this study. This research compiled the citizen understanding of the term 'civic leadership' from residents of Wilhelm. Only three of the interviewed participants in this study had participated in the community leadership program in the last 12 years, since the program shifted to an emphasis of civic leadership. Of the focus group participants, several had been through the Wilhelm program before the program change in 2000, but one entire focus group represented recent graduates of the program. In all, only about one-half of the participants in this study noted that they had involvement or experience with the Wilhelm Leadership Program.

Citizens' understanding of civic leadership

Emerging themes from this research revealed several concepts about civic leadership as described by citizens from Wilhelm. These include that civic leadership:

- Is a civic responsibility;
- Is based in personal motivation or motivated by a personal passion;
- Is expressed through action.
- Is for the betterment of the community
- Has shared benefit (collective good)
- Involves working together and collaboration
- Is associated with the work of elected officials
- Is seen as synonymous with service to community organizations and civic groups

The relationship of civic leadership and local government was complicated. Several participants in this study defined civic leadership as the work of elected officials, while others suggested that serving through local government was an important way to engage in civic leadership. The elected local government representative interviewed in this study noted that involving citizens in leadership roles was a necessity for smaller rural community success. However, the association with government was an impediment to engage in civic leadership for some who attributed the responsibility of civic leadership to elected government officials. Participants expressed a strong association of civic leadership to service through government, and through civic groups and organizations.

In addition to affirming themes from interviews, focus group participants added detail to what gives individuals more influence within the community. Specific influencers of ability to make civic change included:

- Money

- Social status, and

- Length of time in the community or a family history in the community

Participants spoke of service through organizations and civic groups as both *what* civic leadership is, and *how* citizens are involved in civic leadership in the community.

Citizens' involvement with civic leadership.

Interview participants shared stories and examples of how they experienced or were involved in civic leadership. Physical artifacts were utilized when possible to confirm stories of citizen engagement. As participants described the ways in which they engage in civic leadership, three avenues of engagement in civic leadership were described. These included involvement through:

- Self-initiative (grass-roots initiated process)

- Service through organizations, (serving existing clubs and organizations)

- Service through government (volunteer service)

Experience with civic leadership and ability to create civic leadership were compared for interviewed participants. This addresses research questions of both how citizens are engaged and their perceptions of ability to engage. Of those interviewed, ten of the fourteen represented that they both *can* and *have* created civic change. This double positive, or yes/yes response, was also a dominant impression for participants in the focus groups.

Focus group participants were all active initiators of community change. Civic leadership through service to government and through organizations was emphasized in focus groups. Thirty six different community service or project examples of civic leadership were described by participants in the community of Wilhelm. Three examples repeated frequently included the city sales tax supported community improvement projects of the public pool, library, and opera house. Participants in this study were asked to share examples of how they are

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involved in civic leadership. Personal involvement stories generated twenty eight of the thirty six projects mentioned. In other words, twenty eight of the thirty four research participants were able to identify first-hand examples of involvement in civic leadership.

A recurring theme began to emerge across the data consistently describes an approach citizens have used to lead community change. The process, as repeated by many participants, involves the steps of: the identification of a need or issue; communication of the need; establishing a network of support; and organizing a response to the need.

Citizens' perceptions of their ability to participate in community change.

The aspect of how citizens participate in civic leadership was analyzed by two factors: reported involvement with community change; and how participants perceived their own ability to affect change. A simple Yes/No response chart identifies if participants *have* affected community change, and if they believe they *can* affect meaningful change. Four interview participants gave a mixed response. A mixed response indicated one of two possible combinations. Either they *have* been successful with community change efforts but felt barriers or disempowered when asked if they felt they *can* make change; or they have not participated in, or have not been successful in community change efforts, but feel that they *can* make change. These examples of citizens experiencing disempowerment were detailed in the chapter. None of the participants in this research indicated that they both *have not*, and *can not* participate in civic leadership to make community change.

Interview participants were also reviewed by income category. Results show limited economic association with the above perception of ability and experience with making change, with one exception. All of the interviewed participants with incomes under $50,000 annual household income represented a mixed response in their perception and ability to make change.

Citizens' perceptions on civic leadership change.

Perceptions on community level opportunities for civic leadership were varied. In interviews, four participants stated they thought opportunities were increasing in the community; four participants were not sure, and five characterized civic leadership opportunities as stable. Challenges of engaging younger adults, busy schedules, and evidence of a declining culture of social capital were all referenced. On the contrary, an expanding base of community services was identified as evidence of expanding opportunities for involvement. Increased communication through the internet and an expanded connectivity to opportunities were also mentioned as evidence of increase in opportunities. Focus group one determined that the opportunities were cyclical depending on current needs and situations within the community.

Both interview and focus group participants emphasized that there was a culture of civic leadership in the community. While no one knew exactly what to attribute that culture to, suggestions included the religious history and background of the community and examples set by visionary community leadership in the past.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusions

The community is an arena of both turbulence and cohesion, of order and disarray, of self-seeking and community-oriented interaction; and it manifests its dualities simultaneously. It should be studied for what it is and on its own grounds – not as an ideal type of an old form of social life, but as a dynamic and changing field of interacting forces.
--Kenneth Wilkinson, The Community In Rural America, 1991

The Importance of Civic Leadership

Effective civic leadership is important for the success of rural Kansas communities. Civic leadership describes a grass-roots approach to empower citizens for active civic life and encourage public participation. Engaging in civic leadership is an expression of community development as it encourages citizens to identify and address shared community issues. In a time of changing economies, demographics, and resources, the importance of engaging citizens in stepping up for community leadership cannot be under-stated. This research set out to explore how civic leadership is experienced in a rural community. Seeking a community that is described as an exemplary community, this research embarked on a study to listen to citizens to better understand and document the lived experience of civic leadership. The community of Wilhelm was purposefully selected as a case study because it was one of several communities identified by the Kansas Leadership Center representing a "great example" (J. Crouse, personal communication, September 9, 2011) of civic leadership.

Participants in this rural location describe a community rich with citizen engagement. Observations suggest the community is brimming with activity, and physical data reflects a breadth of citizens acting in organizational and project leadership roles. As a researcher who has worked in community development for the last 12 years in Kansas, I am impressed with

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Wilhelm's levels of engagement, positive attitudes for change, and the diversity of accomplishments in the community. One comment, however, shared during an interview in the coffee shop in Wilhelm, hints of a hidden reality. The woman I was interviewing lives in poverty.   When I asked her how she would characterize opportunities of leadership in the community, she responded; "There is plenty of opportunity for leadership. But what the opportunity says is - you need to come to us and do it our way - where you don't feel comfortable."   Her comments were sincere. She was not feeling left out, she just recognized that in order to participate she needed to play by someone else's rules. Whose rules was she referring to? What are the hidden realities of civic leadership in Wilhelm?

When community members in this study describe their understanding of civic leadership, they detail *what* civic leadership is; *how* civic leadership happens; and *who* does civic leadership. These different ways of both understanding and addressing civic leadership are insightful, and each lends a better understanding of how citizens perceive and take part in civic leadership. This chapter details these aspects of civic leadership and discusses them in light of the results of this study.

The Wilhelm Understanding of Civic Leadership.

One of the things the community of Wilhelm has working in its favor is an intuitive understanding of civic leadership. Participants in this study understand civic leadership as way citizens take responsibility and action for the betterment of the community. Descriptions of civic leadership by many participants in this study highlight that civic leadership is a perceived sense of responsibility, to others and to their community, where the collective work results in shared benefits. These descriptions are consistent with how Meissen (2010) in *The Journal of Kansas Civic Leadership Development* defines civic leadership as "acts of leadership in which

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individuals attempt to enhance the common good of their community based on a perceived sense of responsibility" (p. 83). The community of Wilhelm is rich with examples of citizens who are stepping forward to take action to improve the community or living situations of others. Participant stories and descriptions of civic involvement display strong themes of taking responsibility for the community while actively working for change.

Listening to participants talk about civic leadership, it is clear that a sense of responsibility to the community runs deep. When citizens in Wilhelm speak of how they step up to provide civic leadership, many describe the motivation for the community as a passion. The concept of civic action rooted in a personal passion seems especially relevant to situations where citizens are initiating efforts to address community issues. These efforts occur through existing organizations or through newly created organizations. In Wilhelm, examples of citizen initiated activity include establishing two shelter services for the homeless, and the healthy food backpack project, each started by individuals to address a community need. The term passion was mentioned by an individual who had helped his son organize an interest group and approach city government with a proposal for a skate park. It was echoed by a team of participants who organized a group to establish a hiking and biking trail, and again by participants who spearheaded efforts to organize shelter services for needy citizens. The necessity of having a deep rooted passion for action in civic leadership is important to give the initiator of change a strong will for dealing with adversity, as well as a persuasive influence with other community members. When reflecting on changes in the community, one community member said, "This community has either attracted or raised individuals that are bulldog tenacious - for doing good things" (Participant, Focus Group 2, July 16, 2012). While this is not a part of the definition of

civic leadership as shared by Meissen (2010), this is an important attribute of the lived experience of civic leadership.

Civic leadership involves working together.

A second important addition to the concept of civic leadership is the idea of working together. Wilhelm residents echo the importance of working collectively to bring about change. Civic leadership, as described by citizens of Wilhelm is more than an individual effort. Community change requires involving others and forming networks of individuals to work together. Wilhelm residents emphasize the importance of working together when making significant community change. While the definition from Meissen (2010) does not expressly mention collaboration, the work on civic leadership does often include the aspect of shared, collaborative work. Chrislip (2009) notes that in practice, civic leadership development is intended to transform civic culture; "Moving from an exclusive, often divisive and ineffective, civic culture to a more inclusive and collaborative civic culture capable of doing adaptive work and ensuring accountability"(p. 37).

The community of Wilhelm understands the importance of partnerships, sharing resources and collaboration. City leadership in Wilhelm spoke of the importance of collaboration and partnerships between city and county government. Community program leaders spoke of the importance of working together with city and state programs, and the director of the Wilhelm Business Development Company stressed the importance of shared responsibilities to support the best interests of the community. Interagency and intergovernmental collaboration is strong in the community of Wilhelm. More than an isolated cooperation, Chrislip (2009) asserts that civic leadership must integrate into the lives and structures of the community. A good example of this from Wilhelm was a program started by a

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mother of a middle school student. When she became aware of how important school meals are for some economically disadvantaged friends of her daughter, she began to inquire about the availability of food to them over the weekend. Realizing the lack of consistent resources to make healthy foods available, she began preparing healthy foods in backpacks and sending them home with her daughters friends on weekends. As awareness of this situation and activity grew, so did the program. The school system picked up the program and started offering it, and the Kansas Food Bank eventually became involved to provide the food for the packs. This story followed a familiar pattern when residents in Wilhelm tell about programs that start with an individual or small group of people, and then become integrated into systems that sustain the activity. The frequency of stories and examples given in Wilhelm of individuals creating responses to community needs and situations where no current structure exists is an example of the 'culture of adaptive work' Chrislip (2009, p. 37) referenced.

Yet, there is something missing in the way that Wilhelm does collaboration. While the community does an excellent job of mobilizing and partnering with other organizations and resource holders, civic leadership may require more. In reference to facilitating civic leadership interventions, O'Malley (2009) writes, "Especially important to civic leadership, these individuals purposefully seek ways to engage an expansive and unusual group of citizens" (p. 14). An expansive and unusual group of citizens refers to others in the community beyond the power and resource holders. O'Malley (2009) went on to describe the *unusual* voices as: "the silent and broad middle, as well as members of minority groups …[whom] tend to be unengaged, complacent, and apathetic – unwilling or unable to enter the polarizing fray" (p. 63). My conversations with a young Hispanic man at the restaurant, and my visit with the young mother in poverty suggest that they did not feel they had been purposefully invited to participate.

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Neither mentioned that they had been discouraged to participate, but it was made clear that if they did, the rules of opportunity were set by someone else in the community. This suggests that there is work yet to be done to create an inclusive civic leadership culture in this community.

Connections between civic leadership and community betterment.

A third important element of civic leadership that emerged in this research relates to how citizens actualize the concept 'to enhance the common good' (Meissen, 2010, p. 83). The definition of civic leadership as used by Meissen (2010) defines civic leadership as enhancing 'the common good' (p. 83). The participants in this research spoke frequently of working for the betterment of community. The way Wilhelm residents described civic leadership as action for community betterment helps to both simplify and expand the understanding of civic leadership. To understand civic leadership as acts of community betterment include acts to improve the physical community capitals as well as the mobilizing community capitals highlighted in the literature by Flora, Flora, & Fey (2004) and detailed in chapter 2. Civic leadership is seen through community betterment actions that include improving the physical, economic, or natural resources of the community, as well as improving the human, social, political or cultural elements in people's lives. This distinction is important because it emphasizes bettering both physical and economic aspects of the community as well as human and social aspects of community.

How personal capital assets influence civic leadership.

When defining civic leadership, Wilhelm residents identify several attributes that support or enhance a person's ability to effectively create change. Participants in this study identify

money, social status, and length of time living in the community as attributes that place some in a better position to make change than others.

As noted in chapter two, individually held capital can be used to influence interactions and change (Bourdieu, 1983; Bourdieu, 1986; Sharp, 2001). While capital assets can be used to suppress involvement and social contribution (Bourdieu, 1986), capital resources can also be used to help empower citizens as they realize their influence. It is the status and interplay of these capital resources that contribute to the functional structure of society itself. Identifying capital is a way to define and quantify the resources and influence an individual holds in relationship to others in a community field. Money is a form of financial capital. Money can be personal financial capital, or, if invested at the community level, can become a community capital (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004). Either way, financial capital can provide leverage of influence because of the potential to accomplish work. As a Focus Group 1 participant repeated, "Money talks." But an important take-away understanding of learning about capitals, is that money is not the only voice in the room. Cultural, social, natural and political capitals are also forms of influence. Forming a coalition is a way of creating and aligning power. While the idea of mobilizing power is threatening to those who view power as a zero-sum exchange (if one gains it, another loses it), it need not be if the goal of civic leadership is to create power *with* rather than power *over* others.

Financial division within the community is a perception of the Wilhelm residents who point to the middle and upper class, and indicate that those classes have the influence and resources to participate in civic leadership, while the lower class does not. It is a significant finding that all of the participants in this research study with the lowest incomes identified civic

leadership as the work of others. It is important to highlight that the capital asset of having

money or having access to money is perceived as a powerful asset for influencing change.

"Social status" is also identified as a divisive aspect of the community. Recall that one of

the interviewees mentioned that the social networks in Wilhelm were "cliquey" and that an

individual needs to "earn" their status through involvement in those cliques. This is an

illustration of what Flora, Flora & Fey (2004) were referring to as high bonding social capital.

Bonding social capital refers to those close redundant ties that build community cohesion, but

can be seen exclusive to those not in these tight social relationships. Social status and history of

a family may also be considered cultural capital of an individual or family.

The idea of length of time in the community is noted by several participants as an asset to

creating change in the community. Many of those interviewed moved to the community and

identified themselves as "outsiders" even though some had lived in the community for up to 30

years. One participant who lived in the community for twenty-two years stated, "I am not from

here, and you have to be from here to know the details of it all" (Wilhelm community member

interview, May 12, 2012). Several participants indicated that civic leadership is easier for those

with more money and longer ties to the community.   In a member-check correspondence where

I was confirming that I heard them say that financial and social status in the community were

influential, the participant responded, "This is also the pool from which most of Wilhelm's civic

leaders have come, which is probably not uncommon"(Community business leader, personal

correspondence, July 30, 2012). This comment indicates that strong social or economic

networks may replicate power and exclude others from leadership.

Overall, the participants highlight that economic status is a factor, even though the

demographics reflect that the community is, on state average, a wealthy community.   Research

suggests that social networks may be tight and exclusive, and suggests there may be strong cultural capital influencing the norms and expectations of community leadership.

Civic leadership is shared voice and goals.

One additional aspect of defining civic leadership is inclusion in establishing shared goals. Allen, Morton, and Li (2003) defined shared leadership as "the co-creation of an environment by a group of individuals, organizations, and communities with the intent to accomplish a common vision and collaborative goals" (p. 4). This definition captures the concept of shared responsibility and relationship development important for effective civic leadership. The concept of civic leadership represents more than power sharing by authority figures, it encapsulates the idea of shared power by the people of a defined community acting in the interests of their community. In reference to facilitating civic leadership interventions, O'Malley (2009) writes, "Especially important to civic leadership, these individuals purposefully seek ways to engage an expansive and unusual group of citizens" (p. 14). Currently, Wilhelm does not have a community vision or shared goals that include the entire community. This is not to say the community does not have goals. The Wilhelm Business Development Council and the city facilitated the development of an economic strategic action plan, and the city and other organizations within the community have goals. Each of these organizations acts independently or in tandem to develop and achieve their action plans. No effort, however, has been undertaken to include all citizens of the community in conversation about the overall needs and future of the community. No efforts are currently underway that both engage the "unusual voices" of the city or establish opportunities for citizens to act together on shared community goals. If civic leadership is thought of as a process of inclusion and collaboration; or if it is thought of as

involvement in broad community issues, the community is not demonstrating this by engaging the full citizenry in these ways.

Fitting In and Making Space: How Citizens are involved in Community

Two ways of exercising civic leadership became evident in this study. First, citizens discussed efforts to serve through existing community structures by 'fitting themselves in' to community organizations and local government. These existing social or organizational structures provide opportunities for plugging in and getting involved.   A second way citizens discussed involvement is by creating networks and organizations where none existed previously. Creating change without the benefit of an existing organization requires 'making space'.

Fitting In

Wilhelm residents suggest two ways of plugging into service through community organizations: service through government, and service through community organizations. Both of these concepts were frequently repeated in the interviews and focus groups. Their definition of civic leadership emphasizes a link between civic leadership, community organization, and social structure. In addition to describing how civic leadership takes place, action through these systems is understood to be synonymous with civic leadership. By describing civic leadership as service through organizations, citizens' defined civic leadership as the structure through which it happens. This association has mixed implications.

Civic organizations play an important role in the development and action of civic leadership. It is important to emphasize, as noted earlier, that most civic organizations have a particular focus, purpose or goals they are trying to achieve. When the goals of the group are community-benefitting goals, the work of the organization provides an avenue for broader

community development. It is important, to note, however that organizational structure adds both structural efficiencies and organizational parameters which may be barriers to broad engagement. A civic group, for example, offers an identified purpose and recognized identity, regular meeting times and a membership list. These structural and organizational efficiencies provide new members an established credibility, reputation and social networks within the community. Joining an organization also means that there may be barriers to community involvement. These may include the mission of the organization, organizational rules, and social norms. In contrast, when a citizen has a particular passion or cause, it may or may not fall within the priorities of a particular organization.

The second avenue for fitting into community structure is the potential of service through local government. When local government engages citizens in the decision-making and betterment of the community, the community structure becomes a vehicle for community engagement and civic expression. Of all the community structures, local government is the organization which should have the community needs and priorities as the primary focus of their energy.

If community members identify civic leadership as the work of elected government officials however, the association with government becomes an impediment to engage in civic leadership. By attributing it to elected officials, the responsibility of civic leadership is removed from the citizen. This abdication of civic responsibility is documented in this case study. It is most strongly represented by a middle aged, lower income gentleman, but was also suggested by others in the study. The local government representative, on the other hand, was making purposeful efforts to organize engagement opportunities for citizens. In an interview with a local

government elected official, he emphasizes that involving citizens in leadership roles is a necessity for smaller rural community when he describes:

> Civic leadership is those of us that are heading up local and county government, and different not-for-profit agencies are involved in lots of different things. They are involved in input. They are involved in volunteerism. We are all involved in working on projects together in smaller communities. But back to volunteerism, we can't achieve anything in a smaller town under 15,000 without volunteerism. So there is a key element of civic leadership that has to come from private citizens. Private citizens need to lead groups, to know issues, to do a lot of different tasks. (Wilhelm elected official, June, 2012)

Wilhelm's local government is making efforts to involve citizens in both voice and action, through outreach, structuring opportunities for involvement, and listening and responding to citizens. The government sees itself in the role of convening the community and as a structure with the purpose of engaging citizen leadership in a democratic society.

In summary, if civic leadership is synonymous with service through government and community organizations, then it becomes the organization's core responsibility to engage citizens to work for the common good, and not only toward the goals of the organization. When aligned with the community interests, this structure strengthens the perception that in order to participate in civic leadership, one must work through existing organizations and adopt their norms.

Making Space

Stories of engaged activities shared by participants provide many examples of civic involvement through organizations and government. An additional avenue of involvement

involves citizens creating their own efforts to organize and step up to address specific community issues. Wilhelm residents repeated stories of mobilizing for change as they shared examples of organizing to create a skate park; organizing a weekend food-pack for kids program; organizing a trails recreation group; creating a shelter for women; and organizing the Circles™ initiative. These are just a few of the examples of people working together to create an organized response to a perceived community need. These processes of citizen organizing indicate a level of citizen agency to create change. Organizing these networks to address change can bring individuals and groups together; redistribute resources, and produce meaningful change within the community. When a group forms to address an issue within the community, they are building social connections and networks. When done purposefully, these social networks can bridge social, economic, or demographic barriers. Narayan, (1999) suggested that the development of weak or cross cutting ties is important for breaking down inequalities of power and access. In Wilhelm, the Circles™ program is a good example of a program implemented with the intent to break down barriers of access to power, resources, and social class. These types of initiated activities within the community are important because they create and strengthen opportunities to address specific community issues.

An Engaged Community

Wilhelm reflects a complexity of engagement. Every person I formally interviewed had been involved in, or believed they could create meaningful community change. This included the non-positional leadership interviews as well as city and program leaders. Not counting duplicate examples, thirty six different examples of civic leadership community service or projects are described by the thirty four participants in the study. Several examples of

community projects are repeated frequently. These stories include three city sales tax supported community improvement projects: the public pool/waterpark, the public library enhancement, and the restoration of the opera house. The number of projects identified reflects a high level of awareness of civic action happening in their community by participants. In addition, participant stories indicate direct involvement in 28 of the 36 projects mentioned. The level of involvement reflects a high 'saturation' of involvement in civic leadership among the research participants. Admittedly, the referrals of the 20 focus group participants were likely those already known to be involved in civic leadership. Observation evidence indicates that the participants in this study were not a part of a small set of engaged individuals in this community but representative of broad participation. Likewise, physical artifacts reflect strong civic involvement including the fifty names listed on the Economic Strategic Planning Document and indication of additional participation on committees and work groups. Also, a review of community organization board membership revealed a diverse list of participation with little overlap. This case study suggests that participation in leadership roles is shared by a large group of citizens within the community.

What does this tell us about Wilhelm? There appears to be a highly involved base of citizens and strong potential for citizen involvement. While this study was not designed to measure involvement, observation indicates broad opportunity. It is important to know, however, how the potential to be involved is perceived by many of the residents who are not engaged. The ability to organize to address community needs is a foundational aspect of functioning community.

Wilkinson (1991) describes a local community "is a place where people live and meet their daily needs together" (p. 2). He goes on to explain, "a local society is a comprehensive network of associations for meeting common needs and expressing common interests. A

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community field is a process of interrelated actions through which residents express their common interest in the local society" (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 2). It is in this community field that citizens identify shared needs and goals and organize to address them. Brennan and Israel (2008) explain, "How these individual fields are organized and interact with each other has a great deal to do with how power is distributed within a local society" (p. 88). Clearly, if there are resource, cultural, social, or other barriers of some type, the development of community is suppressed. Again, Wilkinson (1991) notes "If interaction in a community is suppressed, community is limited" (p. 17). Inversely, in communities where interactions flourish, relationships develop, and resources can be accessed, community grows. Luloff and Swanson (1995) explain: "The collective capacity of volition and choice, however narrowed by structural conditions, makes the notion of community agency important in understanding community well-being" (p. 2).

In Wilhelm, the twenty- eight of the case study participants mention they had direct involvement in civic leadership projects. More impressively, of those twenty eight, most had created networks or organizations to bring about change. Each of the twenty eight had connections to other involved citizen networks. In addition, when asked if citizens felt if they can bring about meaningful change, most acknowledged they believed they can. This response may reflect a confidence in their abilities, or may reflect their perception of the Wilhelm community openness to change. Asking citizens about their ability to make community change addresses their perceptions of individual agency. As residents and groups interact over issues of common importance, community agency emerges (Wilkinson, 1991; Luloff & Bridger, 2003; Brennen & Luloff, 2007; Brennen & Israel, 2008).

Persons involved in this study describe how they organize for change. The process that is described was repeated by participants in both interviews and focus groups. The process

described by many participants in this research involves the identification of a need or issue, communication of the need, establishing a network of support, and organizing action. Wilhelm citizens' in this study detail the process they utilize to create action groups and address community issues. Through the development of trust relations and by organizing networks, residents pool and invest capital resources to address shared concerns and assert power. This is an illustration of community capacity. Civic leadership creates and supports meaningful engagement. Meaningful engagement builds community capacity. Chaskin (2001) submits, "Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community" (p. 7). This important connection lends insight to understand the direct and important links between civic leadership and the development of community capacity to identify a need and implement a strategy to address the need.

By looking at community interaction from a field perspective, it is clear that community is more than a group of people who live near one-another. By understanding the community as a social field, suddenly the civic leader's work has community development implications. The essence of community development is when civic leadership helps citizens to identify needs, and communicate those needs to others who organize and collaborate. Bhattacharyya (2004) describes community development work as a process that aims to support citizens in their efforts to "build solidarity and agency through self-help, felt needs, and participation" (p. 5). The purpose of civic leadership is support the citizen work to address issues, through action to serve their community.

Who Owns 'Civic'?: Blurring the Dichotomy of "Us" and "Them"

Nearly every interaction and indication of civic leadership work in Wilhelm points to engaged citizens working together to make change. Yet, there is a theme that must be addressed. Who sets the rules for civic engagement, and why are some persons not participating?

Civic Leadership and Community Power

If civic leadership embraces the concepts of shared power, and engaging "unusual voices," who controls civic leadership? There were times during this research that questions were raised about who participates and who doesn't. For example, during the interview with a young woman in poverty, she stated, "There is plenty of opportunity for leadership. But what the opportunity says is, you need to come to us and do it our way - where you don't feel comfortable." Who is "us"? Whose rules are they?

How citizens participate in civic leadership is analyzed using two factors: reported involvement with community change, and how participants perceived their own ability to affect change. A simple Yes/No response chart identified how participants had affected community change, and if they believe they can affect change. Four of the fourteen interview participants gave a mixed response, indicating one of two possible combinations. Either they have been successful with community change efforts but encountered barriers or felt disempowered when asked if they can make change; or they have not participated in, or were unsuccessful in community change efforts, but believed that they could make change. Either the participant believes they do not have the skills, resources, or abilities to participate in civic leadership; or participants believe that the community creates barriers to involvement. While the Wilhelm community leadership program adopted a skill-based approach to help citizens gain skills and

aptitude for civic leadership, the issue of community barriers is not addressed. When interview participants were reviewed by income category, results indicated that all of the interviewed participants under $50,000 annual household income expressed challenges to affecting meaningful change within the community. Others also expressed challenges, but no other income categories were unanimously challenged. Several participants identified civic leadership as something in which the middle and upper class participate, but that those in poverty are not involved. While most had similar understanding of the concept of shared civic leadership, the lived experience of shared power and leadership, in actuality, was not as equally shared by the citizens in a community.

Community power and perceptions of leadership are intricately related. Several competing theories have described how power is arranged at a community level. Max Weber, in *Economy and Society* (1978) describes a dominating power structure under the ruling class – a class of people with higher education, higher income, accumulated wealth from generation to generation, and greater access to resources. The community power paradigm of classism appears to exist in Wilhelm. Three of the interviewed participants characterized the community power structure as being run by those in the middle and upper classes. Classism, as described by Weber (1978) does not imply that a social class is actively governing a community, but that the economic and social priorities and policies are established by, maintained by, and skewed in favor of a distinct class of people. A variation on this structural understanding of community power includes the concept of the "growth machine" (Molotch, 1976). The "growth machine" concept identifies a coalition of groups or individuals that pursue economic gain and work to encourage economic growth to capture the economic benefits. Examples of growth machine actors may include a combination of interests: developers, construction companies, insurance

agents, real estate agents, commercial or rental property owners, bankers, and business developers. A community example representing this type of power structure in Wilhelm is the board of directors of the Wilhelm Business Development Company. The conversation with board members of that group discussing strategies to maintain elected leadership to represent the economic interests of the business community is an example of a "growth machine" power.

A challenge with these characterizations of community power is that they conflict with the civic leadership paradigm of shared power. When groups and factions form in the community, even when the groups have honorable intentions, they are often working to address specific interests. These actions create social fields around issues. As mentioned earlier, the community is a collection of individuals and groups interacting to assert power when addressing specific issues. Flora & Flora (2008) warn against confusing activity with community building. They note the "all too frequent contradiction between a flurry of activities by community based organizations and a lack of improvement at the level of community itself" (p. 123). Brennen and Israel (2008) note that the creation of networks and maintenance of channels of interaction may be directed toward more limited interests, and not toward shared community interests. This creation of social fields is important, but may not represent the development of the community field. There may be numerous social fields in a community, each of which consists of individuals and organization working toward a particular goal. The types of services offered through these programs may be very important, as is the case of the homeless shelters, youth recreation programs, and services for the needy in Wilhelm. They remain, however, disassociated activities. Flora and Flora (2008) note:

> If a set of interrelated actions associated with a social field is focused on the whole
> community, we may talk of a community field. A set of actions within a community field

serves a general community interest rather than specific private interests. A community

field, then, is the pattern of interaction that focuses on the entire community. It can be a

single organization that looks out for the interest of the community, or, more likely, it

may be a web of associations, firms, and even governmental entities that collaborate for a

common purpose. (pp. 123-125)

These dynamics illustrate the complexity of the social field and the power within the community.

Wilhelm, a community with very little diversity, may be high in bonding social capital as

characterized by the leadership cliques (Zacharakis and Flora, 2005). Bonding social capital

often "tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).

If civic leadership recognizes its role in creating citizen agency and to support community

development, the approach of addressing change must involve the interests of all people in the

entire community. As Brown (2011) describes, "For the people to rule themselves, there must be

an identifiable collective entity within which their power sharing is organized and upon which it

is exercised" (p. 49). For rural communities, local government is the logical, and often the only

organization that has a purpose of supporting and growing the community itself. The

responsibility of supporting community quality of life and growth (not just business growth) falls

to the local elected leadership.

In Wilhelm, this case study determined that a shared community vision has not been

developed. There is an economic strategic action plan, but it was specifically developed for the

purpose of strategic economic stability and growth, and did not engage the entire breadth of the

community or address the economic needs of everyone in the community. The economic action

plan is disassociated with other community needs. The community economic prioritization

occurred at the same time social and cultural programs are seeking community and financial

support. The frustration with disparate approaches came out in this interview with a business leader,

> [Some in town] would think we have these great businesses so we will attract the right people, and we will have a great town. I guess it is just whether, you know, you believe in the whole trickle down business, or you know, do you believe, you know, we have an economic, moral and social responsibility to help our community and help individual people – and I do, you know? (Private business owner interview, July 2012)

Noting the expression of conflicting philosophies emerging in the interview, I asked which one was driving change in Wilhelm, to which she responded:

> Well, we are trying to partner with the other. We are trying to show that when we can help people know the hidden rules of the middle class, that we can partner with industry and we can all benefit. That will always been a challenge. What has built Wilhelm has been industry. But that isn't enough anymore. Many in poverty work full time. It isn't just about getting a job. I think to be successful going forward, we have to work together. Then we can put some people to work and they become those good employees. (Private business owner interview, July 2012)
>
> Citizens leading different efforts capture the complexity of this rural community.

Without an organized and purposeful process to listen to the priorities of the entire community, the results are often the "flurry" (Flora & Flora, 2008) of projects. The risk of the flurry includes utilizing scarce resources on projects that are first in line, as opposed to those determined most important. Another potential drawback is the risk that projects that pop-up and forwarded to decision-makers do not serve the needs of the entire community.

Who "Governs" Civic?: Toward Pluralistic Power Sharing

While community action can help create stronger social networks, empower citizens, and address community needs, it is also possible that these social networks are exclusive networks, and that the community needs are isolated or disassociated with community priorities. David Mathews (2002) notes there is a distinction between public *action* and public *acting* (p. 27). Public acting requires the engagement and civic leadership of the public, not just interest groups. When the community priorities are determined by the general population, the partnering and development of a shared approach to civic leadership may most closely resemble the community power characterization forwarded in Robert Dahl's (1961) work. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* is often referenced as a classic study on the concept of pluralism. Pluralism occurs when all individuals hold some degree of power. While they may aggregate for causes, and have different access to institutional power and resources, this systems of competing interests, laws, rules, and differing priorities creates working balances of power. In Wilhelm, a wealthy, predominantly homogeneous community, opportunities for engagement seemed to be open and plentiful to many. One interviewee, who had recently moved to the community claimed he could not identify the "power holders" of the community, but described that, "In this community – here is the reality of this community – if you come in expecting something and it isn't here – you can either get mad about it, or you can go make it happen" (Wilhelm resident, guided interview, June 12, 2012). Yet other community members stated that they can participate if they follow the rules and fit in. These contradicting examples of community pluralism highlight the complexity of Dahl's thesis and the complexity of the lived realities of civic leadership to Wilhelm residents.

Conclusion

This case study investigates a community identified as demonstrating exceptional civic leadership capacity. Interactions with a variety of residents indicate citizens do exhibit both ability and confidence around creating meaningful change in the community. However, citizens were uncertain what to attribute the culture of civic involvement to. Participants identified barriers to civic leadership involvement do exist in the community. Perceived barriers to involvement identified include association with income levels, social class, longevity in the community, and connection to networks. While the participants in this study share a general understanding of civic leadership, the absence of both a common definition and a commonly shared vision for developing the culture of civic leadership is evident. While the potential of 'leader-full' communities envisioned with civic leadership is tempered by the reality of individual situations and priorities, the potential for creating systems of opportunities for engagement are not. This research finds that citizens look to engage through civic groups, local government, and by creating responses to community needs.

This study captures the complexity of civic leadership within a rural community. In answer to the question; who makes community change for whom? The presence of persons believing themselves excluded indicates that there are barriers to full participation in civic leadership in the community. It suggests the presence of a leadership clique, or more likely a network of community leadership cliques, which serve as barriers to inclusive citizen action and participation in civic leadership. In Wilhelm, there appears to be a large pool of civic leaders, who participate in decisions that affect community change. What is not clear is how to best engage the unusual voices of the community, or how those without involvement can amass

enough social capital to have their voices heard and become full participants in a pluralistic community (Dahl, 1961).

This study examines how citizens understand, are involved in, and perceive their ability to participate in civic leadership. It provides insight into the dynamics of civic leadership in a rural community. Though care must be taken when generalizing case study research, during my twelve years of experience of working with rural communities throughout Kansas, I can identify other rural communities with similarities in community demographics, and culture. It is clear that social demographics and assumptions about civic leadership in Wilhelm lend perspective from which to inquire about civic leadership assumptions and activities in other rural communities. Through this intensive study of one community we are better able to understand the complexities of civic leadership in a rural community. Practitioners wanting to increase citizen understanding and involvement in civic leadership can learn from the success and shortcomings of this study community.

Further research is needed to expand the documented data base defining and describing civic leadership. Participants in this case study described the ways in which they engage in civic leadership through involvement in civic groups and community organizations; through involvement in local government; and through initiating activities that organize citizens for some type of community action. An assessment inventory of civic engagement opportunities could be used for community self-evaluation, establish a bench-mark of community engagement, and serve to build community awareness of avenues and opportunities for civic leadership expression.

Further research utilizing event analysis techniques could strengthen the understanding of civic leadership. Evaluating the processes used in community change events can reveal the

levels of public investment and involvement in community change events. Event analysis can investigate both *what* community change has happened and *how* those changes came about. Trends in community change processes can serve as an awareness building assessment for communities and could serve as a point of demarcation for measuring purposeful civic engagement efforts through community action planning.

Qualitative research plays a necessary and important role in understanding how citizens experience civic leadership. Additional critical case studies would not only broaden the data base to further examine commonly held assumptions and barriers to civic leadership, but also contribute to a growing base of understanding of the lived experience, challenges, and successes of community supported civic leadership.

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References - Figures

Figure 1: Community Capitals Framework. Community Capitals PowerPoint presentation, Neal

Flora, 2006

Figure 2: John Cromartie & Shawn Bucholz, EDA/USDA Data – Definitions – State Level

Maps. Accessed at: http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/ruraldefinitions/KS.pdf March 26, 2011

Appendix A - Interview Facilitation Guide

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP BY CITIZENS IN A

MIDWESTERN RURAL COMMUNITY

The following is a sample interview script for the guided individual interviews. While these questions will form the structure of the interviews, additional questions will be asked for clarity and to explore emerging ideas or themes.

Pre-Interview: Researcher defines purpose and outcomes of the project and secures informed consent. After collecting informed consent forms, the interview begins.

1. *How many years have you been a resident in this community?*
2. *What does the term "civic leadership" mean to you?*
3. *Tell me a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community- what does civic leadership look like?*
4. *Think about how civic leadership has impacted you directly. How would you describe your experiences of civic leadership in this community?*
5. *Let's take a moment to look back in time at the history of _____(Wilhelm) Think about the community changes that happened in the 1990s. What were some of the significant Community Change events that marked that decade?*
   a. *Tell me more about those community changes: where did the change initiative come from?*
   b. *Who were the initiators of the change?*
   c. *How did that change come about? Tell me more about the process and people involved and what they did to bring about the change.*
6. *Take a moment to reflect back over what was happening in the community in the first decade of 2000. What significant community change events have marked this past decade?*
   a. *Tell me more about those community changes: where did the change initiative come from?*

b. *Who were the initiators of the change?*

c. *How did that change come about? Tell me more about the process and people involved and what they did to bring about the change.*

7. *If you were to characterize the changes in opportunities for civic leadership available to community members over the last 20 years, which of the following best describes the change?   Declining, Static or Increasing.*

   Tell me more about why you feel this way and please give examples.

   <u>*Contingency Questions:*</u> *determined by how they characterized opportunities for civic leadership*

    1 Declining: To what would you attribute there being fewer opportunities?

    2 Static a) There have never been opportunities, or b) there have always been opportunities: To what would you attribute the sustained opportunities (or lack of)?

    3 Increasing: To what would you attribute there being more opportunities?

8. *How would you describe YOUR current ability to make change or provide leadership in/for the community?*

Following the interview, participants are asked to complete the demographic card below.

Demographic Response Card:

Please complete responses that best represent you. All responses are kept confidential.

<u>Gender:</u>   Male _____   Female_____

<u>Age:</u>   18-38 _____   39-65 _____   65+ _____

<u>Ethnic Background:</u> American Indian/Alaska Native _____   White _____

Asian _____   Black _____   Hispanic or Latino _____ Other _____

<u>Religious Affiliation:</u> _____

<u>Education:</u> Did not complete High School _____   High School Graduate

_____

Bachelor's degree or higher _____

<u>Annual Income:</u>

Appendix B - Focus Group Interview Facilitation Guide

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP BY CITIZENS IN

A MIDWESTERN RURAL COMMUNITY

The following is a preliminary script for the focus group interviews. While these questions will form the structure of the interviews, additional questions may be asked for clarity and to explore emerging ideas or themes. Begin interview by having participants sign consent forms and mark their name on the timeline corresponding to when they arrived in town. The first focus group interview question is one everyone should respond to.

What does the term "civic leadership" mean to you? [allow all to respond, not in sequence around room]

Tell me a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community- what does civic leadership look like? [allow all to respond, not in sequence around room – begins to establish a format of open interaction]

1. *Think about how civic leadership has impacted you directly. How would you describe your experiences of civic leadership in this community?*

2. *Let's take a moment to look back in time at the history of (community)*

   a. *Think about the community changes that happened in the 1990s. What were some of the significant Community Change events that marked that decade?*

   b. *Tell me more about those community changes: where did the change initiative come from?*

   c. *Who were the initiators of the change?*

d. How did that change come about? Tell me more about the process and people involved and what they did to bring about the change.

3. *Take a moment to reflect back over what was happening in the community in the first decade of 2000. What significant community change events have marked this past decade?*

    a. Tell me more about those community changes: where did the change initiative come from?

    b. Who were the initiators of the change?

    c. How did that change come about? Tell me more about the process and people involved and what they did to bring about the change.

4. *If you were to characterize the changes in opportunities for civic leadership available to community members over the last 20 years, what best describes the change and why? <u>Contingency Questions:</u> determined by how they characterized opportunities for civic leadership*

    i. Declining: To what would you attribute there being fewer opportunities?

    ii. Static a) There have never been opportunities, or b) there have always been opportunities: To what would you attribute the sustained opportunities (or lack of)?

    iii. Increasing: To what would you attribute there being more opportunities?

5. *How would you describe YOUR current ability to make change or provide leadership in/for the community?*

Demographic Response Card:

Please complete responses that best represent you. All responses are kept confidential.

Gender: Male _____   Female_____

Age: 18-38 _____   39-65 _____   65+ _____

Ethnic Background: American Indian/Alaska Native _____   White _____

Asian _____   Black _____   Hispanic or Latino _____ Other _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

Education: Did not complete High School _____   High School Graduate _____

Bachelor's degree or higher _____

Annual Income:

Less than $25,000_____ $25,000 - $49,999 _____

$50,000 - $74,999 _____ $75,000 - $99,999 _____

More than $100,000 _____

Appendix C - Interview questions and data source comparison by research question.

Research Questions	Data Source			
	Interview Questions	Focus Group Questions	Observation	Physical Artifacts
How do citizens understand civic leadership?	2,3,4,7,8	1,2,3,7		X
How are citizens involved with civic leadership in this rural community?	3,4,5,6,8	2,3,4,5,8	X	X
How do citizens perceive their ability to participate in community change?	2,3,4,8	3,4,8		X
How do citizens perceive changes in civic leadership in the community over time?	1,5,6,7,9	4,5,6		X

Interview Questions

Q1. *How many years have you been a resident of the community?*

Establishes scope of history. Anyone not a resident for more than 20 years will not be able to reflect on long-term community change.

Q2. *What does the term "Civic Leadership" mean to you?*

Primary question for gaining perspective on citizen understanding of civic leadership.

Q3. *Tell me a story that exemplifies civic leadership in this community – what does civic leadership look like?*

Examples of civic leadership in action will help to better explore and explain concept.

Q4. *Think about how civic leadership has impacted you directly. How would you describe your experiences of civic leadership in this community?*

To collect examples of how citizens are involved in community civic leadership.

Q5. In Interviews: *Think back to what was happening in Wilhelm in the 1990s, what were some of the significant community changes that marked that decade?* Probing questions:

Where did this change initiative idea come from? Who was involved in the initiative?

Q. 6. In interviews: *Think back to what was happening in Wilhelm since the turn of the century, what were some of the significant community changes that have taken place since 2000?*

Probing questions:

Where did this change initiative idea come from? Who was involved in the initiative?

Q5 and Q 6. In Focus Groups: *Facilitated time-line questions comparing 1990 decade to 2000 decade of community change. (see script for full question detail) .*

To identify community change events in the last two decades and characterize cause of change, primary chance actors, and the inclusivity of change processes over time.

Q7. *If you were to characterize the changes in opportunities for civic leadership available to community members over the past 20 years, what best describes the change and why?*

To characterize changes in community level civic leadership over time.

Q8. *How would you describe YOUR current ability to make change or provide leadership in/for the community?*

To characterize self-perception of agency and power to make change in community