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Abstract

Public administration faculty have an obligation to engage their communities to improve conditions and the efficiency and effectiveness of government and nonprofit organizations. Engagement is also important in transmitting to students the "craft" knowledge of the profession of public administration through applied projects, internships, case studies, and community-based projects. Furthermore, faculty develop professionally through engagement by gaining a deeper understanding of relevant theory and practice that can be shared in the classroom. Reluctance by faculty to invest time and energy in their communities because of traditional university biases toward more theoretical work can partially be addressed by wider dialogue on the benefits of engagement. This paper contributes to this needed dialogue by reflecting on how engagement has informed the teaching and understanding of public administration theory and practice as well as been a benefit to the agencies and communities served.

Introduction

Over the past few years, two comments from local practitioners have remained with me. In a planning retreat with our Master of Public Administration (MPA) Community Advisory Board, a city manager lamented the lack of a deeper connection between the university and the community, wondering why this is so and what can be done to increase collaboration. On another occasion, after a visit by my ethics class to his facility, a local nonprofit executive director stated, "We are all delighted to know that you have your feet planted in the terra firma and not entwined by the vines in your ivory tower" (D. Skinner, Personal Communication, 2014). The divide between universities and their communities reflected in these comments is puzzling to me, because as a professor of public administration at a regional comprehensive university, there are so many opportunities to become engaged in your community and the mutual benefit is clear. Indeed, the numerous examples of foundations, conferences, and university units focused on engagement imply that faculty members have an obligation to use their expertise to improve conditions in their community and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government and nonprofit institutions (nerche.org/index.php; https://communityengagement.uncg.edu/icee/; comunityengagement.uncg.edu). The civic obligation is compelling, and it is evident that such engagement can have a positive impact on the community (Meltzer, 2013; Gazley, Bennet, & Littlepage, 2013). The importance of engagement in transmitting to students the "craft" knowledge of

the profession of public administration through non-classroom projects, internships, case studies, and community-based projects is also well documented (Farmer, 2010). However, the cost to faculty of such engagement is also clear, particularly when it takes away from time needed to write and participate in more theoretical forms of scholarship more readily recognized by the academy (Saltmarsh, Giles, Ward, & Buglione, 2009). I agree that one of the reasons for this divide between communities and universities is the well-documented lack of incentives for this work in the tenure and promotion systems for faculty, but another factor is that faculty do not reflect and share the benefits of engagement with other academics as often as we should.

At the same time, there is also a cost to the communities that engage with universities, and all too often you hear communities complain about faculty and students who "helicopter in," do their work taking up the time and resources of staff and clients, and then leave without any real impact on their operations and conditions. Academics have an ethical and professional responsibility to consider what their community clients have learned as well (Butin, 2010; Casey, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this needed dialogue, and reflect on how engagement has informed my teaching regarding public administration theory and practice in both the local government and nonprofit sectors, but also how it has enhanced the learning experience of students and the agencies in ways that are most difficult to accomplish in the classroom.

Specifically the article reflects on three questions:

1. How has engagement provided "teachable moments" for my public administration students and enhanced their preparation for professional careers?
2. How has engagement informed my understanding of public administration theory and practice?
3. How has this engagement been a benefit to the agencies?

This article will first outline the range of engagement activities that provide the basis for these observations, then reflect on the teaching lessons and impact on students and agencies, and conclude with not only how these experiences resonate with the theory and lessons provided in public administration textbooks and literature I utilize in human resources, leadership, strategic planning, and ethics classes, but how this engagement has made an impact on the leaders, staff, and clients of the agencies.

Engagement Activities

As a public administration faculty member, I have had the opportunity to develop relationships and build credibility in the community through a number of avenues, including consultations/facilitations, supervision of internships and community-based student projects, development of community advisory boards, and inviting practitioners to speak to classes. It is not feasible to respond to every request, so I attempt to identify those opportunities that are likely to provide useful experience for my classes and bridge theory and practice. For example, having the experience as a president of a nonprofit board provides useful examples and insights for my leadership class, such as building a culture and shaping a vision for an organization. Community facilitation roles provide an opportunity to observe and examine how theories on conflict resolution or strategic planning relate to practice. These connections also provide exciting opportunities for student projects, particularly in skill-based classes such as strategic planning, human resource management, and leadership. Students not only gain experience using tools and techniques, but they also learn about concepts not easily transmitted in the classroom, such as politics, group dynamics, and self-awareness.

Equally important, the engagement activities selected are a result of close collaboration with the agencies to ensure their needs are addressed. I have been amazed and inspired by the thirst of government and nonprofit agencies for interaction with university faculty and students. Based on my experience and dialogue, this desire for engagement by practitioners is for three primary reasons. First, there is the convening and facilitation power of the university. Universities provide an objective, relatively safe place for contentious community actors to come together to discuss difficult issues. Faculty without agendas can play the role of facilitator by structuring effective conversations in an atmosphere of trust. Second, university faculty have needed expertise in areas like strategic planning that community agencies may not possess. Third, faculty and students bring new energy and frameworks for addressing problems when agency resources are constrained. The following statement from a community client (a city manager) captures these benefits well:

> University/community engagement is integral to both entities becoming best in class! In this era of scarce resources and challenging opportunities, effective partnerships and engagement becomes most crucial. As a partner, universities often bring untapped resources (physical, human, and others) to leverage creative resolution of issues. They also offer a safe place to share, discuss, and debate such matters. They are often seen as an independent source to facilitate community issues in a manner that assures all perspectives are shared. Lastly, as a significant economic engine in communities, universities have a vested stake and responsibility for active involvement and engagement in the communities they serve (S. Cheatham, Personal Communication, February 15, 2017).

The following list describes the array of personal engagement activities and student projects that provide the raw material and observations for this paper.

Faculty Engagement Activities

Co-Facilitator of County Safer Schools Task Force

At the request of the district attorney, I co-facilitated a task force of 16 public school personnel and community leaders in the wake of the Sandy Hook school shooting to assess safety conditions in the schools and develop a set of recommendations to reduce the risk of school violence.

Co-Facilitator of County Health and Human Services Consolidation Study

At the request of the county manager, I co-facilitated a group of managers from the Public Health and Social Services departments and other community stakeholders to develop a proposal for consolidation of the two departments. This effort also involved a team of students conducting focus groups and surveys referenced here.

Board President of Local Nonprofit Organization

Served as board president of a nonprofit that provides emergency and transitional shelter for children and families facing homelessness.

Board Chair-Elect, United Way Local Chapter

Served on board and community investment committee for the local United Way that collects and disburses over $2.5 million each year to local nonprofit agencies.

Co-Facilitator of Police-Resident Neighborhood Conversations

As part of a community task force on youth violence, I co-facilitated nine small group conversations between residents and police officers in high-tension neighborhoods.

Facilitator of Development of Organizational Core Values

At the invitation of the leadership team of the town of Leland, I designed and facilitated the development of a set of core values through a process that engaged the entire staff of the agency.

Facilitator of Strategic Planning Process

I was invited to facilitate the strategic planning process for the Mecklenburg Disability Awareness Coalition.

Student Engagement Activities
Client Satisfaction Interviews and Community Focus Groups for Health and Human Services Consolidation Study

I supervised students in design and implementation of focus groups with local church and nonprofit directors and conducted personal interviews with 174 clients of the public health and social services departments. Efforts were designed to obtain feedback on the quality of services and identify areas of duplication and inefficiency.

Employee Satisfaction Survey of Police Department

I supervised a team of students in working with the police department to survey officers on levels of satisfaction with working conditions and human resources policies.

Strategic Planning Projects With Local Agencies

I supervised teams of students in the design and delivery of strategic planning sessions with local government and nonprofit agencies. Students facilitated the examination and development of mission and vision statements, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses, and identification of strategic issues facing the agencies. The variety of agencies included:

- Homeless shelter
- Rape crisis center
- County sheriff's judicial division
- Disability resource center
- Employment center for displaced individuals
- Abused children center
- United Way Board of Directors
- Local government public utilities department

Study of Collaboration Within a Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence

I supervised a team of students in an examination of the levels of collaboration between key community partners utilized by a local nonprofit in efforts to reduce youth violence by providing a variety of youth development services and programs.

Organizational Assessment of Communities in Schools Program

I supervised a team of students conducting interviews of staff on what is going well in the organization, what are the barriers to effectiveness, and what would they like to see changed.

Examination of High School Dropouts

I worked with a team of students to conduct 11 focus groups including 114 students, parents, and teachers to gain a better understanding of why students drop out and ideas on what the schools and community can do to lower the dropout rate.

Teachable Moments for Students and Community Members

To be prepared for the professional workplace, students in a graduate public administration program must not only be steeped in the literature

but have the opportunity to learn by applying theories and concepts in the field. Community members also benefit by being exposed to different frameworks or approaches to challenges they face. The following discusses five salient learning lessons for students and agency staff engaged in the various community-based projects described.

Trust the Process

In the comfort and controlled environment of a classroom, it is relatively straightforward to walk through Bryson's (2011) SWOT analysis. I take the students through a measured discussion of the definition of each component, and manage the time allotted to each step of the process to stay within the class schedule. Bryson provides a wonderful conceptual map for how the strategic planning process should flow in a controlled setting. However, when the students go into the field and apply the model with agency staff, they experience a different world. Under time pressures, students experience staff jumping in with solutions before the SWOT analysis has been done. Some participants are convinced they know what the problems are, and they do not truly appreciate why time has to be taken to first go through what they see as a painstaking group SWOT discussion to uncover what they already know. Students have to learn to tactfully acknowledge these contributions and feelings, but firmly ask the participants to honor the process and task at hand, reminding them of the value of getting as much feedback from everyone at the table first. The process then produces ideas and information that participants may not have known, and better solutions with more shared understanding and buy-in. The agency partners in turn have the rare opportunity to step back and focus on the substance of the conversations, and can rely on someone else to keep them on track. This is particularly useful when there is strong disagreement over fundamental elements of a mission or vision statement expressed by strong personalities or powerful stakeholders. Having a well-structured process helps to ensure that all voices are heard and fully vetted.

This lesson was evident to students to the benefit of the local United Way Board of Directors when students facilitated a process to identify the strategic issues facing the organization. Although intimidated by leading an audience of experienced, strong-minded corporate executives, they followed the process and assisted the group in identifying the need for a committee to focus on developing a

new communications strategy for the agency. This effort led to the execution of a series of focus groups with potential donors and a new emphasis on social media and new venues for sharing their message. The CEOs shared that they could not have gotten there without the structure provided by the students. Students and participants learned the value of the phrase, "trust the process."

Power of the Facilitator Role

Classic textbooks on organization development and process consultation address the fundamental importance of the role of the outside expert providing assistance to an organization (French & Bell, 1998; Schein, 1998). Students are taught the basic difference between a consultant providing technical expertise and one providing facilitation. If you are brought in as a technical expert, you have the responsibility to use this expertise to provide solutions to problems. However, if you are brought in as a facilitator, your role is to design and foster a process that provides an opportunity for participants to hear each other, develop a shared understanding, and find their own answers. In his work on catalytic leadership, Luke (1998) describes the power of the facilitator role in bringing diverse interests together by focusing on common problems rather than having a stake in one particular response or solution. The power and value of the facilitator role is the absence of a perceived independent agenda or opinion; you are there to make sure the process provides an opportunity for all participants to be heard and decisions are made with legitimacy. Thus a skilled facilitator is careful to report back accurately only what is shared. This fundamental difference between a consultant providing technical expertise and a facilitator shepherding a process must be experienced to fully appreciate. In the field, students quickly recognize the power of this role when disagreements are raised. For example, when a statement by the student as facilitator is challenged by agency staff, the students learn to respond not by arguing but by referring the individual back to the data collected from the participants themselves; this technique returns the focus to the data and the other participants who provided the data instead of the facilitator. Students gain confidence and an appreciation for the power of the facilitator role by going through such an experience (and also the importance of accurately reflecting participant statements and feedback!). Public administration students need to experience the value of being a process rather than content champion. Agency partners react in a positive

fashion to students in this facilitator role because they realize the inexperienced students do not have any answers, so a more relaxed, less threatening climate is evident compared to when a more experienced, older facilitator is present. The agency staff in a sense adopts the students as part of their team and the focus is on shepherding each other through the process, which is precisely the goal of a facilitated session. A local government department director summed up her experience by sharing, "…the university serves as a neutral convener or facilitator, which allows us to bring together community interests or groups that otherwise would not sit down together" (B. Schrader, Personal Communication, February 17, 2017).

Relating to Diverse Citizens

Students in graduate professional degree programs like an MPA often come from the professional or upper classes, with little exposure or understanding of the lives of citizens from other socio-economic, racial, or cultural backgrounds. In ethics class we examine what it means to serve in the public interest, and discuss the six constitutive standards of the public interest articulated by Goodsell (1990). One of these standards is "agenda awareness," which focuses on the role of the public administrator in demonstrating concern for the needs of the poor and powerless rather than responding primarily to pressures from powerful and well-represented groups. A useful way of emphasizing the importance of this standard is providing opportunities for students to interact with citizens outside of their comfort zone. An excellent example is a series of personal interviews conducted by students of a random sample of individuals in the waiting area of the local Department of Social Services. These individuals were of all ages, genders, colors, and economic backgrounds, waiting to apply for any number of services, including Medicaid and food stamps. Some students waded right in, sat down next to people, and started chatting with them, explaining the purpose of the interview and how the information would be useful. However, other students were visibly uncomfortable and hesitant about how to approach individuals. One female student in particular struggled and had difficulty gaining cooperation for the interviews. Perhaps not surprisingly, she was very well dressed, with makeup, jewelry, and well-coiffed hair. She reported back to me in distress, noting that not only did people refuse to be interviewed by her, but she was convinced they made sure no one else in the waiting room would speak to her. Upon reflection, it was clear that the background and life experience of the students mattered. Coming from a fairly sheltered, upper-class background, the lack of comfort by the student was sensed by the clients, suggesting judgment of their circumstances. Her physical appearance exacerbated the situation, as she had the look of someone going to an expensive lunch downtown. Other students had the foresight from experience to dress down a bit to jeans, no makeup, etc., so that they could blend in better. Needless to say, this experience made a lasting impression on all of the students. Another teachable moment for the students was the discovery that one of the people waiting in line for food stamps was another university student; this discovery provided an understanding that recipients of social services are not as different from them as they might think!

Another experience that addressed cultural diversity was the focus groups of high school dropouts. The vast majority of graduate students likely have reasonably positive experiences and success in elementary and high school settings or they would not be in a position to pursue a professional graduate degree. It was instructive for them to listen to African American students and parents share their level of discomfort with schoolteachers and administrators, and their strong perception of a double standard for white and black students in the application of discipline measures. Furthermore, focus group discussions with incarcerated youth revealed the lack of appreciation for how education can make a difference in the quality of their lives; there was a strong sense that these youth lacked positive role models and basic socialization from parents and community regarding the benefits of education that graduate students may take for granted. It is one thing to read this in a book or article; it is quite another to hear it up close inside a detention facility where one can feel the hopelessness and resignation to a life on the margins. These student experiences speak to Farmer's (2010) concept of the "othering" of certain citizens to mere recipients of services, where they are treated "…as of little or no account, as of little or no importance, as of second or no class" (p. 134). The theme here is for the importance of MPA programs, which are preparing students for careers of service to the whole community, to sensitize students who are often the products of what is disturbingly still a society largely segregated along racial, cultural, and economic lines. As a local government official

noted, "Diverse participation builds trust, leads to shared understanding and common goals and measures of success." (B. Schrader, Personal Communication, February 15, 2017).

The Importance of Adaptability

An important skill inherent in teaching about leadership is the ability to adapt to the situation. Northouse (2013) cites the importance of Hersey and Blanchard's theory of situational leadership, where an effective leader must adapt his or her style to the context of the situation, including the nature of the task and the developmental level of people involved. Kouzes and Posner (2012) discuss how exemplary leaders are "in the flow" (a state of optimal performance) by mastering the ability to "continuously assess their constituents' capacity to perform in the context of the challenges they face" (p. 257). Again, it is possible to simulate this skill in the classroom with scenarios, but student experience in the field is more powerful. In the process of conducting field interviews to examine the effectiveness of collaboration in the community, students learned a very hard lesson about the need to adjust interview questions when it became apparent that their presence in the community was becoming disruptive to the relationship between a new board and executive director (J. Jones-Halls, Personal Communication, 2014). In their zeal to collect data, the students were not sensitive to the changing interpersonal dynamics and lack of trust between the board and executive director. In a similar vein, students learned they had to adjust the survey questions being asked of the police officers. Again, the questions they developed were appropriate to addressing employee satisfaction levels, but they discovered that in the real world there are questions that the leadership is not ready to address. This experience is also an illustration of the concept of "meeting people where they are," meaning that one must assess the readiness of an organization for a message or decision. Students learn that they must be ready to veer from a pre-determined process or plan. Finally, students learn from having to adapt to the messiness of the world outside of the classroom. A group of students engaged in an organization development project with a local after school enrichment program was excited to collect insightful data from staff about concerns with the leadership of the agency, including perceptions of favoritism and inconsistent treatment that was damaging staff morale. However, when the students shared these findings with the entire agency, the executive director exploded, informing me that the students have done "untold damage to the agency" (L. Hicks, Personal Communication, 2013). Of course, what she really meant is that this data was an indictment of her leadership and made her look incompetent to the staff. With coaching, I demonstrated to the client that she had the opportunity to be a great role model to her staff by showing she is willing to listen to them and make adjustments to her leadership style. However, the students learned a hard lesson about the nature of sensitive information and the importance of clearing such information through appropriate channels before making a presentation to a wider audience.

It's All About Focus and Perseverance

The world of the practitioner can be captured well by colorful images, such as the ranger putting out forest fires, the stretch figure being pulled in multiple directions, or the swimmer fighting to escape a whirlpool or riptide. Mintzberg (1987) notes the importance of strategy to focus effort and promote coordination of activity, otherwise you can be "rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic" (p. 26). Another relevant principle is the "80/20 rule" or Pareto Principle; when applied to organizations it means that your greatest gains come from 20 percent of your efforts, or conversely, we spend 80 percent of our time on the least important matters! (Koch, 1998). These images and concepts help students understand the daily challenges of practice in the government and nonprofit worlds, where there are multiple pressures from stakeholders of every stripe providing distractions and emergencies that regularly disrupt carefully crafted plans and timelines. The work can be exhausting and dispiriting, with tangible signs of real progress difficult to decipher. Although such images help, students benefit from the opportunity to experience this world and understand the challenge of keeping focus on what is truly important and persevering against multiple obstacles. In their projects facilitating strategic planning sessions, students experience the challenge of keeping agency staff with a range of styles, ideas, and solutions to focus on what is truly fundamental to agency success. They also learn the sheer energy and resolution required to communicate with management and staff, obtain responses to requests for information, and simply get people to the table. They also learn that not everyone lives in the world of social media, email, and text messaging; sometimes there is no substitution for a real voice or personal interaction!

For example, despite the challenges of connecting with a small nonprofit in a rural community in a separate county, the president of the agency reported the following:

> The MPA students had a great impact on Pender County Christian Services. They provided help in various areas such as developing manuals for the Board of Directors, employee manuals and strategic planning for the Board. The students also revised our mission statement and developed a vision statement as well. I was impressed with the knowledge these students had acquired in their studies and [how they]utilized their skills to enhance our mission. They were truly a blessing to our organization and I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with them (S. Harris, Personal Communication, February 13, 2017).

Connections to Public Administration Theory and Practice

Beyond providing teachable moments, observing and working with community members has also provided several connections to public administration theory and practice that have deepened my appreciation and understanding of the literature I discuss in the classroom and provided useful lessons for agency staff. Five of these connections are particularly salient.

Implementation Can't be Emphasized Enough

Translating ideas into action is one of the clearest challenges for a leader. There is no shortage of talkers, but far fewer doers. Hrebiniak (2006) suggests that "the problem with poor performance is not with planning, but with doing. Making strategy work is more difficult than strategy making" (p. 12). From my experience as a community facilitator and board leader, I don't think the answer is simply that people lack commitment, time, or energy. That may be partially the case, but I think it is also due to a failure of leadership and structure. There is a great deal of attention in the literature about the need for leaders to be transformative by inspiring people with great vision and passion (Burns, 2003). Although not nearly as exciting, I would suggest that more emphasis be placed on the need for leaders to communicate specific goals and clarify the roles of followers in achieving those goals. People are energized by knowing exactly what is expected of them and how their work is essential to the agency's performance. Conversely, energy is sapped by ambiguity and vagueness. Grand visions are wonderful, but just tell people what needs to be done today or this week! There is also a great deal of discussion in the literature about fostering creativity and empowering employees, but people still respond to structure where there are clear timelines, areas of responsibility, expectations for products, and accountability. As Rainey (2009) notes, this observation reinforces the relevance of the path-goal theory of leadership, where "effective leaders increase motivation and satisfaction among subordinates when they help them…see the goals, the paths to them, and how to follow those paths effectively" (p. 319). In my work with community task forces and commissions, I consistently hear members lamenting about how all they do is talk; they have great ideas and stimulating conversations but they cannot seem to make concrete progress (D. Sobotkin, Personal Communication, December 6, 2016). This is particularly true of organizations that lack a process champion, and is most evident when a process champion is lost. As an outsider with fresh eyes and a degree of legitimacy as a faculty member, I have been able to work with such organizations to identify champions and give them responsibility for taking the lead on specific, concrete tasks. Furthermore, organizations must celebrate victories and the achievement of milestones; this is difficult without established benchmarks. Although his focus is at the national level, Volcker (2014) is speaking to this very issue when he quotes Thomas Edison as stating, "Vision without execution is hallucination" (p. 440). Grand talk and ideas are wonderful, but what this country needs is more attention to the daunting challenges of implementation, and Volcker challenges public affairs programs to focus less on policy and more on management and performance measurement. Finally, in his argument for why CEOs fail, Charan (2007) suggests it is not the lack of vision or strategy, but the absence of the emotional strength to implement through "execution, decisiveness, follow through, delivering on commitments" (p. 5).

Creating a Sense of Urgency and Sustained Momentum

In the wake of the Newtown school shootings, New Hanover County commissioned a task force to examine their school safety policies and programs. Other school systems across the country have done likewise. However, this task force completed its work one year after the shooting, and

eight months beyond that they were still working on piloting the recommendations in select schools. This experience raises several questions for the world of public administration. First, how does one instill a sense of urgency in large bureaucracies with diffused responsibility, especially when the risk seems removed? The "it can't happen here" syndrome is evident, even though it is clear from the history of these school shootings that it can indeed happen anywhere. Secondly, how does one sustain momentum driven by an initial crisis amidst ongoing competing daily pressures? I find this experience resonates with Luke's work on catalytic leadership (1998), where he suggests that one of the fundamental tasks of public leaders is raising awareness by focusing public attention on an issue. He captures the need to go beyond just statistics and make the issue salient through personal experience and anecdotes that make an emotional connection with citizens. Our local district attorney has an innate sense of such catalytic leadership, taking advantage of every public forum he has to share compelling stories of the youth violence he experiences in his daily interactions in the criminal justice system. He gives both the young offenders and the victims a face. At the organization or task force level, the challenge of urgency and sustained attention to an issue speaks to the classic bystander effect that Cooper (2012) addresses as an ethical challenge in bureaucratic organizations. Organizations or groups can diffuse an individual sense of responsibility unless care is taken to create a "constitutional" organization where participation, authority, and accountability are shared and expectations for all levels are clearly articulated. Importantly, a constitutional organization does not have authority and responsibility focused at the top or among any small number of participants, thus discouraging the idea that the problem is someone else's job to address.

The Power of Organizational Culture

Working with both the New Hanover County Health Department and Department of Social Services drove home the relevance of organizational culture in order to understand different agencies. Schein (1985) defines culture as the "deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment" (p. 6). Furthermore, these

assumptions are manifested externally by language, symbols, and other physical evidence that he calls artifacts. I was struck immediately by the different "feel" of the two department waiting areas. The first thing you encounter at the Social Services Department is a street level, isolated building where upon entering you encounter a metal detector staffed by two to three security guards. You then proceed to one large windowless room with people either sitting down or in line to see a receptionist at a window. Something is playing on the televisions but there is no sound. It has the feel of a department of motor vehicles office. You do not see many smiles. In contrast, the Health Department is located adjacent to the campus of the regional medical center. You walk upstairs where you are greeted by a smiling security guard, and there is no metal detector. Instead of one large room, there are different waiting areas with staff in white coats calling people in to the inner offices when their name is up. CNN is on the television monitors with sound. It has the feel of a doctor's office. The point of this comparison is that these artifacts reflect deeper underlying assumptions about how the agencies view themselves. Social Services is a processing model, where people are potential recipients of services who must be screened to determine eligibility. The Health Department is a medical model, where people are patients in need of treatment or assistance. You process things; you treat people. Not surprisingly, the client satisfaction levels were much higher in the Health Department. However, you must physically sit in these waiting areas for a period of time to truly appreciate the different cultures. This experience reinforces the classic writings of Cyert, March and Simon cited by Gary and Wood (2011) in their discussion of the influence of mental models: "managers have limited information processing capabilities and rely on simplified mental models of reality to organize their knowledge and make sense of the world" (p. 570). The mental model of "processing" versus "treating" reflects a deeper culture of assumptions and beliefs that permeates these organizations and can operate at an unconscious level.

My work with a town in Brunswick County also demonstrated the power of leadership to shape the organizational culture. The local government leaders saw an opportunity for the entire organization to build a stronger set of core values with a move to a new building. I was asked to facilitate a series of sessions with different department employees to

develop a new set of core values that could form the basis for a renewed sense of shared mission and direction. This effort produced a set of five core values: Communication, Respect, Collaboration, Supportive Work Environment, and Service Excellence. A year later, a department head who oversees the initiative reported a "marked improvement in employee morale" and much more communication occurring among employees who have been working on task forces focused on developing new policies to further imbed each of the core values. He noted that the key to success was the use of an external university facilitator to bring the employees together and the continued reinforcement of the values by the town manager (G. Vidmar, Personal Communication, February 15, 2017).

Building Trust by Focusing on Common Goals and Values

My involvement in several community facilitation projects has provided an opportunity to observe up close how it is possible to take a group of professionals with entrenched, opposed interests and zero trust to come together and have productive discussions. In North Carolina, new legislation provided county commissioners with the authority to consolidate their public health and social services departments and have them report directly to the commissions or the county manager. This represented a radical, threatening change to departments that for years had been governed by boards independent of the commissioners. The stated purpose of the legislation was to more closely align the authority with the responsibility held by the county commissioners, but it raised the specter of much more politicized health and social service agencies. In New Hanover County, the commissioners wanted to see if such a consolidation was warranted, and appointed a study group comprised of representatives of the two agencies and their boards to craft a set of options for them to consider. Not surprisingly, there was little to no interest in developing proposals that at best would mean sharing scarce resources and reduce the treasured autonomy of each agency. Nonetheless, participation in the study group was mandated. This situation is not unlike a host of other situations in the public sphere where those with what appear to be opposed interests are forced together: liberals vs. conservatives, gays vs. straights, open vs. closed border advocates, pro-lifers vs. pro-choicers, right to bear arms advocates vs. gun control zealots, etc. After first listening to all of the differences they

had in order to clear the air, progress only began when the facilitator suggested they focus on what both sides wanted for their community and common values they share. Examples from their list were as follows:

- Focus on the consumer of services; enhance and continue to be consumer/patient/client-centered
- Maintain the integrity of programs that work and communicate those factors across department (best practices); identify opportunities to improve services to the community; continue to build upon strong programs at the Health Department
- Increase collaboration to increase positive impact (begin with Departments of Health and Social Services and expand out to schools)
- Improve communication between agencies and with the clients; have an efficient way ("air traffic control") to route people to the correct person the first time
- Focus on impact on employees/workers
- Not negatively impact the stature/standing of the Health Department (New Hanover County Government, 2013).

This exercise released the energy in the group by redirecting attention away from their differences to the values and desires they held in common. This skilled facilitator was demonstrating precisely what Weinberg (1996) describes as Mary Parker Follett's concept of integration, where participants in a conflict are asked to adjust their thinking away from predisposed positions and focus on the creation of something new that interweaves their various desires and concerns. This process builds trust by providing participants an opportunity to share what they really care about, but also demonstrates how by putting aside their own individual "pretty little pieces of colored glass," they can build a rich mosaic rather than merely a "kaleidoscope of community" (p. 280). In a similar vein, Schmidtchen (2013) notes that from his experience with the Australian Public Service Commission, that we get in trouble when we forget that people are not "oxen"; that what people give to an organization is discretionary and one must create conditions based on confidence and trust in order to secure commitment and engagement with organizational goals.

Leadership Is Asking the Hard Questions

In my positions as chair-elect and president of the boards of the local United Way and a human services nonprofit agency respectively, I have learned that leadership is fundamentally about change. But more specifically, it is about how to facilitate that change. Leadership is not only about using influence to inspire people to follow a vision, but it is about asking the hard questions that people around the table avoid. They avoid certain questions because they are uncomfortable as discussing them may ruffle feathers by taking on sacred cows or the answers might mean changing customary ways of doing business and investing the time and energy to learn something new. Toughest of all, asking hard questions raises the possibility that the current people in the organization may no longer be a good fit for where the agency needs to go. But perhaps most important of all, asking the hard questions forces a focus on the right issues needed to either move the organization to the next level, or sometimes just to survive in a changing environment. As a university faculty member with tenure, I have the advantage of raising hard questions without the fear of consequences felt by agency staff. On more than one occasion, I have been thanked for raising questions that no one else in the room wanted to bring up, such as why a particular agency needed to even exist (B. Butler, Personal Communication, December 6, 2016). Raising this question forced a very useful discussion about the unique nature of the agency's mission, reinforcing the value of the agency and creating new energy and solidarity in the room. This observation is very consistent with the core practice of "challenge the process" discovered by Kouzes and Posner in their study of exemplary leaders (2012). After all, if everything is going swimmingly, an organization doesn't need a leader; they merely need a manager to keep things humming. Great leaders are always questioning the status quo, looking for new opportunities and testing the self-perceived limits of individuals and organizations. To the classic phrase, "managers do things right, leaders do the right thing," I would offer a supplemental phrase suggested by Sinek (2009) in his work on leadership: "managers ask how, leaders ask why."

Conclusion

Professors of public administration have many opportunities to engage their communities in ways that not only are beneficial to agencies and citizens, but also provide invaluable field experience for students and deepen understanding of public administration theory and practice. This paper reflects on the most salient points from many years of supervising applied student projects, community facilitation projects, and service in leadership positions. Theories and concepts taught in the classroom come alive for students when they have the ability to apply them in a real setting and experience the subtle contextual factors that impact effectiveness. The faculty member gains the ability to compare and contrast material from textbooks and the literature while reinforcing key points with rich examples from the world of practice. Perhaps most importantly, an engaged professor is able to demonstrate to students and practitioners alike the value of a university working closely with their community. The CEO of a United Way reinforces this point well:

> I believe strongly that universities should be actively engaged with the communities in which they are located. By active engagement, I mean sharing university resources and soliciting involvement in the university by community organizations and residents. If done with the intent of improving the community, this relationship benefits both the university and the community (C. Nelson, Personal Communication, February 14, 2017).

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