Pathways to Community Leadership in Rapidly Diversifying Communities: Preliminary Results

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Abstract

This proposed research begins with the idea that leadership becomes more challenging as groups that include a diversity of cultures and agendas become involved. How do integrative leaders communicate with, inspire, and work with diverse coalitions that cross cultural, national, sectorial, and partisan boundaries? The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality proposes to conduct an explanatory case study of 'Integrative Leadership in Rapidly Diversifying Rural Communities.' Specific research questions asked included: a) "What specific strategies have public, private, and non-profit sectors deployed to create integrative leadership across sectors and ethnic differences?" b) "To what extent have demographically diverse communities promoted opportunities for integrative leadership?" and c) "How can successful integrative leadership strategies be best incorporated into a leadership education program?"

Keywords: community leadership, rural communities, integrative leadership

Introduction

The rural population of the United States is more ethnically diverse than it has ever been in our history and, given prevailing demographic projections, the population is poised to become even more diverse in the coming decades (Lichter & Johnson, 2006). Minnesota's rural communities are diversifying at a rapid pace, and much of this diversity is due to growth in the rural Latino population. In 2010, 2.9% of Minnesota's population was Latino, but in some counties this percentage was much higher. For example, the Latino population in Nobles County (located in Southwest Minnesota) increased from 11.2% in 2000 to 22.5% in 2010. With this in mind, developing effective leadership in diversifying rural communities is a practical necessity now and will be more urgent in the future.

How do leaders in the Latino community differ from Anglos in their leadership biographies and pathways into community leadership? Is this about Latinos stepping into dominant cultural leadership roles (assimilation), or is this about new ways of defining and practicing leadership that don't just take ideas from Anglo culture? Based on these ideas, what strategies best support leadership development among Latinos? In this paper, we argue that understanding the personal leadership biographies and pathways to leadership is an important first step for those who work in community leadership programs who wish to increase cross-cultural collaboration and integrative leadership.

Literature Review

According to Hewlett, Luce, and West (2005), a significant difference exists in terms of how Latinos develop leadership skills in comparison to their other ethnic counterparts. Without an understanding of cultural background differences in Latino communities, traditional leadership development approaches are ineffective. Latino leaders can be categorized under two types, reluctant leaders and unknown leaders (Griffin, 2003). Reluctant leaders are those who appear to have all the necessary skills to become excellent leaders but can't imagine themselves succeeding in a leadership position. Unknown leaders have the right mix of humility, confidence, and leadership skills, but they are not effective in developing the necessary relationships that allow them to make their skills noticeable.

Many barriers hinder the broader community leadership potential, including a lack of social networks between established and emerging leaders, insufficient cultural understanding and respect, and a failure by established leaders to conduct outreach into Latino communities. Cross-sector collaboration is crucial for the success of community leadership. A recent analysis of the social sector affiliations of leadership program participants revealed a strong and positive correlation between the breadth of social sector affiliations among cohort members and self-reported measures of shared future and purpose at the end of the cohort program (Chazdon & Winchester, 2011).

Latinos embrace a unique set of characteristics within their culture. They are known as collectivists and polychromic individuals (Espinoza, 1999). They value group orientation and loyalty to the extended family or group of which one is a part. Family is the most important cultural value for Latinos (Chong & Baez, 2005; Espinoza, 1999; Holvino & Gallegos, 2008). They focus more on promoting the interests of the group over the interests of the individual.

Unfortunately, many white residents in small communities perceive Latinos as "irresponsible" and "uncaring" because of their absence from community events (Chavez, 2005; Curiel, 2007). According to Chavez (2005), Latinos have a different sense of community and of being involved: "They construct their own sense of belonging by forming communities of need that provide the same social, emotional, and political support found lacking in mainstream society" (p. 332).

Data and Methods

This study utilized an explanatory case study approach focusing on four rural Minnesota communities that experienced rapidly increasing Latino

populations in the last decade. Yin (1993) describes an explanatory case study method as being most suitable for situations in which the phenomenon under study is difficult to distinguish from its context. He suggests that an explanatory case study uses pattern-matching techniques to generate theories of cause-effect relationships.

Sample

U.S. census data was used to determine the rural communities in Minnesota with the highest percentage increase in the Latino population between 2000 and 2010. Of the cities with the highest rates of increase, four were selected based on the total population of the city to provide a range of sizes, and on percentages that were practically significant (e.g. cities that had only two Latinos in 2000 and four in 2010 were excluded, even though the percentage increase matched or exceeded cities that were included in the study). As Tables 1 through 3 indicate, each of these communities experienced a rapid influx of Latinos between 1990 and 2010, and by 2010 the proportions of their populations that were Latino ranged from 8% to nearly 36%.

Participants for the study were identified based on researcher knowledge of community stakeholders

Table 1: Latino population, 1990 - 2010

City	1990	2000	2010	% change from 1990 to 2000	% change from 2000 to 2010	% change from 1990 to 2010
Alder	135	1426	3796	956.3	166.2	2711.9
Hawthorn	20	381	796	1805.0	108.9	3880.0
Ironwood	17	107	450	529.4	320.6	2547.1
Sumac	392	2175	4521	454.8	107.8	1053.3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Note: The city names used in this table are pseudonyms.

Table 2: White non-Hispanic population, 1990 - 2010

City	1990	2000	2010	% change from 1990 to 2000	% change from 2000 to 2010	% change from 1990 to 2010
Alder	21548	21589	21466	0.2	-0.6	-0.4
Hawthorn	2532	2960	3098	16.9	4.7	22.4
Ironwood	5489	5191	4954	-5.4	-4.6	-9.7
Sumac	9343	8667	7936	-7.2	-8.4	-15.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Note: The city names used in this table are pseudonyms.

Table 2: White non-Hispanic population, 1990 - 2010

City	1990	2000	2010
Alder	0.6	6.4	15.4
Hawthorn	0.7	12.3	22.1
Ironwood	0.3	2.0	8.4
Sumac	3.9	19.3	35.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Note: The city names used in this table are pseudonyms.

and snowball sampling techniques. Six participants were sought from each city, one White and one Latino participant with leadership roles in each of the three sectors: public, private, and nonprofit. Hawthorne was the only city with five participants, as a Latino public sector representative could not be identified from the researchers' sources. There were 11 females and 12 males (5 Latino females, 6 Latino males, and 6 White females and 6 White males). Participants were contacted by telephone and given a short overview of the purpose of the study and what their participation would involve. They were given a written consent form at the time of the interview that was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota.

Data Collection

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with participants. Interviews were conducted either in person at a location convenient to the study participant or over the phone, and were completed by the graduate research assistant and one of the researchers. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for coding.

The interview protocol began with questions about personal leadership stories and biographies, and moved into challenges and opportunities facing the community, questions about collaborations in the community, and ended with a discussion of collaborative efforts to respond to the increasing ethnic diversity of the community. (See Appendix A for the interview protocol)

In addition to the interviews with key informants, the primary investigator also informally interviewed the graduate research assistant about field observations during the data collection process about the cities and context of the interviews. These observations helped to inform later data analysis. Finally, secondary data were collected from an electronic search of the main newspapers in each of the four cities. The search terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" were used to explore relevant media on the Latino population in the cities, and all article hits that resulted were collected for later analysis.

Data Analysis

All interviews were coded using a hybrid coding system consisting mostly of open coding, but also informed by several theories, including the Integrative Leadership framework (Center for Integrative Leadership, 2012) and the Intercultural Development Model (Bennett, 1986). All coding was completed by the primary investigator and the graduate research assistant, who met weekly to discuss themes that emerged and appropriate codes. Meetings with the full research team were also held periodically to discuss preliminary findings. All interviews were entered and coded in NVivo software.

Preliminary Results

Themes from the Latino Interviews (N = 11)

Building trusting relationships with leadership mentors. Almost all the Latino interviewees mentioned some form of mentorship as being an important element of their leadership story. Mentors came from both the Latino and Anglo communities to support them in their leadership. Some reported that they themselves saw the need to use their leadership role to mentor others in the Latino community.

> But, I've had a lot of great mentors. And I've just been so fortunate to have you know other community leaders, both in the public and the private sector help me achieve those goals, um you know the former mayor has been an amazing ally to me and the center. You know, she's very approachable and a kind hearted person. You know she really understands the community dynamics. And so you know, she's just a wonderful person to just be able to just talk to and hey what's going on. You know what I mean? She's not the mayor anymore, but she's just awesome. She's still very involved in the community, and so that's amazing. (Alder nonprofit sector)

Serving as a cultural liaison or translator. Many of the Latino leaders we spoke with had been recognized as leaders after they spent time in the community working as volunteer or paid translators and community connectors.

> I am like a connection. I'm the interpreter, translator for the school district, so you are involved in the Hispanic community but also involved with the Caucasian community, the general community, as I like to call it. And then, you become that, in my case, that bridge between the two communities, you know, and you just stumble into that position to become a leader even if you didn't ask for it. (Sumac public sector).

Building networks with others in the Latino community for mutual support and to get things done. The need and value in working with others is part of the collectivism culture. The networking relationships developed with others in the Latino community also served as a form of peer support.

> Yeah, and I work with one of them. His name is [name removed]. and I'm sure they probably told you about him. And I mean [name removed] and I work a lot together. We're supportive of each other. Um, I mean he's huge leader here in the community. Everybody loves him and stuff like that. Um, there's other people that work in our school systems like [name removed]. She's the one doing the parent empowerment. And then there's also, there's also um, many I don't know um, you know just other people that work in different institutions, like a bank or something that for us, for us like we're all leaders. We're different sectors but it's a way for us to have a connection or you know, like a communication. Also do like collaborations with each other and stuff like that. (Alder public sector)

Pursuing issues important to the Latino community. The motivation to lead for many of the Latino interviewees came from an interest in addressing issues that were relevant to the Latino community.

> And so we're focusing on these issues because you know when we first met, we said okay, what is keeping our community down. And a lot of it had to do with immigration status, access to education, and deportation, which some of them are started off by getting pulled over and taken to the you know county jail and then deported because you don't have a driver's license. And so you know, those are the things that we're focusing on right now and just given the momentum that they're actually you know in the legislator's minds and they're acting on it and we did a lot with, with um, just last year when the elections were coming up, we did a lot of getting out the vote on voting no for different bills that would affect our community. (Ironwood nonprofit sector)

Moving into mainstream community organizations. Several of the participants described their exploration of mainstream organizations that were effective in getting things done in the community. Some of the participants were actively taking a role at leading these organizations and recruiting Latinos to join them.

> It's the American Association of University Women. We get together like a group of women, like 20 or more, and we have different programming each month that relates to women, leadership and community and all kinds of stuff. It's actually a nationwide organization, and I'm actually one of the youngest in there. They're all older and retired. Don't tell them I said that though, but they are. Great role models. (Alder, public sector)

Themes from the Anglo Interviews (N = 12)

Finding leadership opportunities in positions held. It appears most Anglo leaders that were

interviewed became leaders through more traditional avenues, i.e. work or board membership.

> I was given opportunity 20 years ago by our CEO, so I want to say that I got into that luck. I was part of it, but I think part of it is some of your family background and having a reputation of being aggressive and involved. (Hawthorn private sector)

Following mentors into leadership. Both Latinos and Anglo interviewees talked about the importance of mentors in their leadership biographies. In comparison to the Latino leaders, almost all the Anglo leaders identified another Anglo as a mentor.

"Um, some of the mentors I've had in organizing I had were [name removed], who's now county commissioner up in [name removed] County. Teaches organizing. He was very influential to me." (Ironwood, nonprofit sector)

Filling in voids left due to aging of community leaders. Several of the Anglo leaders interviewed described situations in which they moved into leadership roles because of retirements or deaths of community leaders.

> Yeah I kind of fell into it in a way actually. Is um way back 27 years ago or so, I was struggling with what I wanted to do in my career and I was going back to school and then I got a lower level job in the county just so I could facilitate myself for that. And then based on some retirements, I ended up in the position that I'm at. And as far as mentors, I don't know if I really had any, any true mentors, other than I had, I would go back and then I guess I would have, I had some guidance from a couple of commissioners. Who in my peer group, would be good people to get together with from other counties. (Alder, public sector)

Working on Multicultural Collaboratives. Some of the Anglo leaders were asked to lead because of their ability to be a bridge between emerging Latino leaders and the community.

> I've also had the privilege with working with many, many emerging leaders, from the different cultural groups, and so that's been an exciting part of the journey for myself as leader, and growing and how to effectively mentor other leaders in their journey to becoming engaged in the community. (Sumac nonprofit sector)

Discussion

The term "leader" was seldom used by our Latino respondents when discussing leadership, but this does not mean that leadership is not being exercised. Our evidence suggests a more complicated reality in which leadership within Latino communities is most energized when it is organized collectively, as a set of tasks that everyone can pitch in to accomplish: "Where we can get together and do stuff and make a difference," said one respondent. By contrast, more formal structures that parcel out titles or roles to individual committee heads seem to engender less participation.

Our findings are consistent with what Hobbs (2000, 2001) found in Oregon. She noted that "Latinos do not think of their contributions as volunteering . . . 'Helping' others, on the other hand, was noted as being second nature to Latinos. It isn't viewed as something you do at a particular time, for a particular group."

Building relationships is critical--with other organizations, with community leaders, with collaborations. Relationships are essential for establishing credibility in the community, and there are no short cuts to investing the time required to build those relationships. Nurturing a sense of connectedness creates trust and a level of comfort that encourage community leaders. A focus on building relationships requires patience, but it is a necessary first step in developing leadership programs that are accepted in the Latino community and in which Latinos are likely to be involved.

It appears that most Latinos who were interviewed did not have long leadership histories. Leading had not been something they were necessarily expected to do, nor has it been a tradition within their cultural groups. The interviewees appeared to be moving from a high power distance to a low power distance cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1993).

Implications for Community Leadership Education

These findings pose a challenge to the traditional leadership models used by many organizations, including Extension. The approach to recruiting future leaders needs to be reframed in ways that de-emphasize the traditional concept of a "leader" and instead structure multiple ways for Latinos to participate as helpers and to become part of a leadership team. Organizations should consider framing leadership development as both a group or organization's responsibility and an individual responsibility. Offering opportunities for new participants to assist with special community events, be part of a small group of friends and family working together, or simply coming to observe and learn without a leadership commitment may be more effective ways of promoting participation and leadership.

Specifically, our findings suggest that community leadership development personnel should:

- Consider the variety of leadership biographies and pathways to leadership in the community. The main goal of the leadership biographies is to discover leadership reality together.
- Work closely with residents to determine leadership program needs, options, and design. This means reciprocal engagement with the Latino community, not trying to sell a prepackaged program.
- Consider a multipurpose leadership development program. One purpose being to build leadership knowledge and skills, a second to aid in the relationship building between Anglo and Latino leaders, and a third to collaboratively address key community issues.

- Collaborate with community groups and organizations that are strong in the Latino community. To be credible, information about a new program should come from sources the community understands and trusts. This involves familiar language, people, institutions, and media.
- Design programs with easy entry points and that allow Latinos to lead without taking on a pre-structured role or a formal, long-term leadership commitment.
- Create opportunities that support and nurture connections among Latinos serving in leadership roles in different sectors of community life.

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